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LAWMAKING AS LEARNING FROM POLISH PERSPECTIVE

Zákonodárství jako učení z polské perspektivy

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Lublin, Poland

ABSTRACT: This article examines the interrelationship between lawmaking and learning in the context of Poland. Drawing from social sciences, particularly political science, administrative sciences, and legal sciences, it investigates how various aspects of the lawmaking process can be seen as a learning process. The study emphasizes the importance of lawmakers' ability to learn from societal developments and to adapt legislation accordingly. In the introduction the article highlights the dynamic nature of lawmaking as a continuous learning process. It examines the formal lawmaking process in Poland, including the role of political parties and the influence of European law. Furthermore, the author argues that lawmaking is essentially a learning process, and deals with how lawmakers identify social problems, create rules to address them, and modify legislation based on observations and societal impact. The article also explores the importance of learning from European integration, changes in technology, society, economy, and security issues. By analyzing the findings and arguments presented, the study links theoretical concepts with practical examples from Polish lawmaking and the impact of European law. It emphasizes the importance of lawmakers' ability to learn from societal developments and to modify legislation to effectively address new challenges. The research contributes to a comprehensive understanding of lawmaking in Poland and highlights the importance of learning for the advancement of legislative processes. The findings gained from this study are of importance to policymakers, legal practitioners, and researchers in the fields of public administration, safety, and legal sciences.

Key words: learning, lawmaking, integration, Polish lawmaking.

ABSTRAKT: Tento článek zkoumá souhru mezi tvorbou zákonů a učením v kontextu Polska. Vychází ze společenských věd, zejména politologie, správních věd a právních věd, a zkoumá, jak lze různé aspekty procesu tvorby zákonů vnímat jako procesy učení. Studie zdůrazňuje důležitost schopnosti zákonodárců poučit se ze společenského vývoje a přizpůsobit tomu legislativu. Článek začíná zdůrazněním dynamické povahy tvorby zákonů jako soustavného vzdělávacího úsilí. Zkoumá formální zákonodárný proces v Polsku, včetně role politických stran a vlivu evropského práva. Dále předkládá argument, že tvorba zákonů je v podstatě procesem učení. Analyzuje, jak zákonodárci identifikují sociální problémy, vytvářejí pravidla k jejich řešení a přizpůsobují legislativu na základě pozorování a sociálního dopadu. Článek také zkoumá význam poučení z evropské integrace, změn v technologii, společnosti, ekonomice a bezpečnostních otázkách. Analýza předložených zjištění a argumentů propojuje teoretické koncepty s praktickými příklady z polské tvorby práva a dopadu evropského práva. Zdůrazňuje důležitost schopnosti zákonodárců poučit se ze společenského vývoje a přizpůsobit legislativu tak, aby účinně řešila vznikající výzvy. Výzkum přispívá ke komplexnímu porozumění

zákonodárství v Polsku a podtrhuje význam učení pro pokrok v legislativních procesech. Poznatky získané z této studie mají důsledky pro tvůrce politik, právníky a výzkumníky v oblasti veřejné správy, bezpečnosti a právních věd.

Klíčová slova: učení, zákonodárství, integrace, polské zákonodárství.

INTRODUCTION

Lawmaking and learning are inherently interrelated and show fundamental similarities. Viewing lawmaking as a learning process reveals the dynamic nature of legislative decision-making and emphasizes the continuous acquisition of knowledge and insights by lawmakers. The concept of lawmaking as learning, which I am trying to develop, requires studies in which the lawmaking process is analysed from a pedagogical perspective.

The essence of learning is acquisition of new information, understanding existing knowledge, and the application of this knowledge to solve problems. Similarly, lawmaking requires legislators to gather information, analyse social problems, and create rules to address them effectively. It entails a process of active engagement in societal dynamics, assessing the impact of legislation, and adapting laws accordingly. This iterative cycle of observation, reflection, and adaptation reflects the principles of learning.

In their pursuit of effective legislation, lawmakers continuously gather knowledge from various sources, evaluate the outcomes of existing laws, and make informed adjustments. They learn from their experience and observation of how laws impact society and individual behavior, allowing them to improve legislation and increase its effectiveness over time. This learning process in lawmaking enables lawmakers to identify and address new challenges, respond to societal changes, and ensure that laws remain relevant and effective.

Furthermore, learning in lawmaking goes beyond a narrow focus on the creation of rules. It encompasses a broader understanding of the complex interaction between law, society, and governance. Lawmakers must acquire knowledge about technological advances, societal changes, economic developments, and security issues to make informed decisions. By incorporating this broader understanding into legislative processes, lawmakers can create laws that respond effectively to the evolving needs and challenges of society. There should be also noted that the development in technology, computers, and artificial intelligence has had a major impact on the lawmaking process. It is relevant in the analysis of data, but additionally, advances in artificial intelligence has the potential to automate many aspects of the lawmaking process (Surden, 2014).

Analogous to learning, lawmaking requires lawmakers to be open to new perspectives, engage with stakeholders, and adapt to changing circumstances. Just as learners actively seek out information and engage in critical thinking, lawmakers must engage in research, consult with experts (Arregui, Perarnaud, 2022), and consider multiple viewpoints to develop comprehensive legislation. This process enables them to gather a wide range of knowledge, evaluate different approaches, and create laws that are informed, balanced, and responsive.

By recognizing the inherent similarities between lawmaking and learning, policymakers can embrace a mindset that encourages continuous improvement and adaptability. This perspective encourages lawmakers to approach legislation as a dynamic process that involves continuous learning, evaluation, and improvement. It emphasizes the importance of staying informed, engaging in evidence-based decision-making, and fostering a culture of learning within the legislative sphere.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are related to the identification of patterns and sources from which the lawmakers can learn. The methodology used is based on a review of literature and laws in this issue, including the historical process related to learning of laws in other countries and international organizations. Examples from educational literature should also be analysed. As in other countries, law in Poland developed on the basis of customs, but with the Latinization of Poland, the influence of Roman Law increased dramatically (Wagner 1990). Later, there could be observed influence of laws of other countries, such as Germany, France, and Russia, as well as from other countries. During the interwar period, Poland underwent significant legal reforms, as it transitioned from being partitioned between neighbouring powers to an independent state. These legal reforms aimed at establishing a modern legal system that reflected the principles of democracy, rule of law, and national sovereignty, but later, they tended towards authoritarianism.

One of the most important legal reforms was the adoption of the March Constitution of 1921, which established the legal framework for the newly independent Poland. The constitution provided for the separation of powers, the protection of civil liberties, and the establishment of a parliamentary system. The later April Constitution of 1935 was clearly an example of a more centralized and undemocratic legal foundation for life in Poland. There can be seen that both Constitutions represented the legal trends of those times in Europe, which can also be seen as an example of learning. Especially the concept of learning organizations should be analysed in this context (Basten, Haamann, 2018).

Poland has introduced administrative law reforms to establish a clear framework for administrative procedures and the functioning of administrative bodies. These reforms aimed to ensure accountability, efficiency, and transparency of administrative processes, including the establishment of administrative courts. The influence of the Austrian 1925 General Administrative Procedure Act on the Polish regulation of administrative procedure both after the First World War and in the Polish Code of Administrative Procedure of 1960 can be traced (Kmieciak, 2021). There can also be seen tendencies to copy organizational provisions in the fields of courts - which should not be seen as something negative when the learning process is based on observing good examples, also fitting local perspective in the copying country (Gessel-Kalinowska vel Kalisz, 2017). These legal reforms were part of a broader state-building efforts, as Poland sought to consolidate its newly gained independence and establish a modern legal system based on democratic principles. The reforms aimed to ensure the protection of individual rights, promote economic development, and establish a legal framework that reflected the aspirations and needs of Polish society at that time.

Poland has been learning from the rest of Europe in various aspects of lawmaking, particularly through its membership in the European Union. The integration process has necessitated the adoption of European standards, directives, and legal frameworks, which has led to significant learning and alignment with European law. Poland is actively learning from European legal frameworks and incorporating them into its national legislation. This includes areas such as human rights, environmental protection, consumer rights, competition law, and data protection. By adopting and implementing European legal norms, Poland is aligning its legal system with European standards and practices, thereby promoting harmonization within the EU. European integration places a strong emphasis on the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. Poland is facing legal challenges related to the reforms impacting its judiciary. Comparing changes related to the importance of the rule of law in different countries would be a political rather than a legal analysis, but there can be clearly seen authoritarian tendencies that could be related not only to societal or technological changes, but that can also as a kind of learning by lawmakers of various countries.

European practice has emphasized the importance of legislative transparency and public participation in the lawmaking process. Poland has been called upon to increase transparency by providing access to legislative information, engaging in public consultations, and involving stakeholders in lawmaking. European integration requires Poland to align its legislation with EU directives and regulations to promote consistency and coherence in areas such as agriculture, trade, transportation, and consumer protection. This coordination ensures the

smooth functioning of the internal market and facilitates cross-border collaboration. Observation and testing the best ways of implementing European Law Directives can also be an example of learning by lawmakers. Poland participates in knowledge exchange and policy dialogue with other European countries. By engaging in discussions, sharing experience, and learning from successful policy approaches in different EU member states, Poland is gaining insights into innovative legislative practices and policy solutions. This enables Poland to adapt and implement effective strategies in its own lawmaking processes. These developments were clearly seen especially just before Poland's accession to the European Union and during the first decade of Poland's presence in the European Union, but there can be currently seen elements of knowledge exchange and learning by lawmakers. These processes are mostly visible during times of reform.

Poland's participation in European integration has provided significant opportunities for learning from the rest of Europe in the field of lawmaking. By aligning its legislation with European standards, adopting best practices, and engaging in policy exchange, Poland benefits from the knowledge and experiences of other EU member states. This learning process contributes to the continuous development of Poland's lawmaking practices and ensures its integration into the broader European legal framework; yet many problems should be noted in the field of lawmaking in Poland. Comparing learning and lawmaking related to emerging problems can be seen as an example of poor-quality learning, or learning how to cheat.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparative analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of lawmaking by examining the differences between common law and civil law systems. Common law systems, found in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, rely heavily on judicial precedents and case law, where judges play a significant role in law creation through their interpretations and decisions. In contrast, civil law systems prevalent in countries like France and Germany, rely on comprehensive codes and statutes enacted by legislatures, with greater emphasis on written laws rather than on judicial interpretation. By comparing these two systems, researchers can explore the contrasting approaches to lawmaking and their impact on learning within the legal framework. The role of precedent in Poland is related to the European integration process, with valuing decisions made by the European courts, but it is also worth noting that different courts cite one another in order to illustrate arguments. The similarity of decisions issued by the courts is an element of legal certainty that ensures the predictability of the law.

In addition to national lawmaking processes, the development of laws in supranational institutions, such as the European Union, represents a unique approach to lawmaking. In the EU, the lawmaking process involves collaboration of member states, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. This multi-level governance structure provides opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange across diverse legal systems and cultural contexts. The EU lawmaking process incorporates learning from different member states and fosters the development of harmonized laws and standards that address shared challenges and promote cooperation.

Poland can learn from other countries' participatory and consensus-based approaches to lawmaking. Emphasis on public participation, stakeholder involvement, and consensus building can increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of Poland's legislative processes. Challenges may arise due to cultural and educational differences, which require efforts to address potential resistance and strengthen civic education to promote active citizenship and a broader understanding of democratic principles; yet there are more similarities than differences between European countries, and the pursuit of uniqueness should not be the goal of legislators.

Lawmaking in Poland is a formal and structured process, influenced by various factors such as political dynamics, legal frameworks, and European integration. Within this context, the learning aspect of lawmaking plays a crucial role in shaping legislation that effectively addresses societal challenges and adapts to changing circumstances. The formal lawmaking process in Poland involves multiple stages, including proposal, drafting, legislative review, and implementation. Throughout these stages, lawmakers engage in a continuous process of learning, acquiring knowledge, and gaining insights to make informed decision.

A key aspect of learning in Polish lawmaking is the identification of social problems and the need for legislative intervention. Lawmakers actively gather information and cooperate with stakeholders to understand societal issues and assess their implications. This learning process enables lawmakers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the society and provides a basis for developing appropriate legislative responses. Learning in Polish lawmaking also occurs through observation and analysis of the impact of existing laws on society. Lawmakers evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of legislation, monitoring its effects on the behaviour of individuals and the functioning of institutions. By learning from these observations, lawmakers can identify areas where legislative adjustments or new laws are necessary to address emerging issues or improve existing regulations.

European integration has been a significant catalyst for learning in Polish lawmaking. Poland's membership in the European Union national legislation to be aligned with European

standards and directives. This process involves learning from European legal frameworks, incorporating best practices, and harmonizing Polish laws with EU requirements. The European integration process serves as a platform for cross-border learning, allowing Poland to benefit from the experience and expertise of other member states. Furthermore, the learning aspect of lawmaking in Poland goes beyond the legislative process itself. Lawmakers undergo continuous training and professional development to broaden their knowledge and skills. This continuous learning enables lawmakers to navigate complex legal issues, consider emerging trends, and make informed decisions that are in line with evolving societal needs.

Administrative Sciences provide valuable insights into the implementation of laws and the functioning of administrative bodies. Scholars in this field study the administrative procedures, organizational structures, and decision-making mechanisms involved in the implementation of laws. They examine how administrative bodies interpret and apply laws, what challenges they face, and the impact of bureaucratic processes on effective lawmaking. It is important to understand the influence of administration of various institutions, such as parliament, determines the quality of a law that is being created. By studying administrative capacity, procedural bottlenecks, and the interaction between administrative actors and lawmakers, Administrative Sciences shed light on the practical aspects of lawmaking in Poland.

Legal Sciences focus on the formal legal frameworks, principles, and norms that govern the lawmaking process in Poland. Scholars in this discipline analyse constitutional provisions, legal doctrines, and precedents that shape the formulation, interpretation, and application of laws. Legal Science perspectives examine issues of legality, legal reasoning, and the role of courts in interpreting legislation. By examining the legal justifications and constraints that impact lawmaking, Legal Sciences contribute to an understanding of the formalities and legal foundations that underlie the lawmaking process in Poland.

Although each discipline brings its own unique perspective, there is often a fruitful interdisciplinary exchange between Political Science, Administrative Sciences, and Legal Sciences. The interaction between these disciplines contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the lawmaking process in Poland. Political Sciences provide insights into political motivations and dynamics, Administrative Sciences shed light on the administrative procedures and challenges, and Legal Sciences analyse legal frameworks and principles. Through an interdisciplinary approach, researchers gain a more nuanced understanding of lawmaking in Poland, incorporating political dynamics, administrative processes, and legal considerations. This holistic analysis – which needs to be conducted even more broadly – enriches our comprehension of the lawmaking process and its outcomes in Polish society.

Polish and Czech historical experiences and geopolitical facts are similar in many ways, if seen from a wider perspective. This also is related to the law-making process. Some legal principles based on Roman law, like *lex retro non agit*, can be seen in many political systems, but are mainly related to the rule of law (Gaczyńska 2017). Polish society is somewhat less democratic in its views than Czech society in general, which also influences views on the rule of law (Pająk-Patkowska, Pospíšilová 2018). Polish and Czech law-making processes share common roots owing to their historical ties, as both partly developed from the broader legal framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The exchange of legislative approaches becomes an opportunity for learning, enriching the understanding of governance, and potentially influencing reforms that harmonize the strengths of both systems.

Lawmakers learn about the process of lawmaking through a variety of sources and experience, including training intended primarily for lawmakers. In Poland, there is a legislative application organized by the Government Legislative Centre, where technical matters related to the legislative process are learned (Waltoś 1996). However, the main sources of knowledge, important in the field of law making are both expertise in the field that is being regulated, and experience not only in the field of law, but also in politics and social psychology. The concept of lawmaking as learning tries to see the process of changing law from educational perspective but should also include knowledge from other scientific disciplines.

CONCLUSION

The lawmaking process encompasses several key aspects that can be seen as a learning process. Drawing from knowledge in social sciences, there can be identified multiple dimensions within the lawmaking process that involve learning. These include the policy process, committee meetings, consultations with experts and the wider public, technical editing of drafts of legal acts, and comparative analysis of existing legislation - including current and even historical legal acts from a state, but also European Law and international law.

The political process is central to lawmaking, involving the participation of various political actors, such as political parties, and interest groups. Through engagement in debates and negotiations, lawmakers participate in a process of learning about different perspectives, societal needs, and policy alternatives. This learning process can allow lawmakers to refine their positions, integrate diverse viewpoints, and make informed decisions that reflect the interests and aspirations of the society they represent. However, in many cases, it is the fight for power that influences the outcomes of the legislative process. This includes not only the

processes inside political parties and struggles between political parties, but also the influence of lobbyists and political as well as economic actors (Laloux, 2020).

During the legislative process, committee meetings play an important role in the lawmaking process, as they provide a platform for in-depth discussions, expert testimonies, and the examination of proposed legislation. Lawmakers learn from expert insights, research findings, and case studies presented during committee sessions. These meetings facilitate knowledge exchange, allowing lawmakers to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter, potential implications, and alternative approaches. Through this learning process, lawmakers can refine and strengthen the provisions of draft acts, ensuring that legislation is grounded in evidence and expert knowledge.

Experts and the wider public are also involved in the legislative process (Arthurs 2009). These consultations serve as valuable learning opportunities, enabling lawmakers to receive feedback, assess the impact of proposed legislation, and consider different stakeholder viewpoints. There should be noticed formal requirements to share information with the wider public during the legislative process, including public hearings, and the role of mass-media. On the other hand, expertise knowledge is more hermetic, and sometimes should not be influenced by interactions with political actors or the general public (Kudryavtsev, Khujanazarov, 2022). All these perspectives should be taken into account not only when analysing the lawmaking process as a learning process, but also while assessing which influences have positive and negative impact on the quality of law and the quality of life in a country. The equilibrium between specialization and democratic influence is not easy to achieve, and requires good will and experience, as well as learning about the legislation in other countries.

The technical editing of draft acts involves a meticulous examination of legal language, coherence, and consistency. This process enhances the quality and effectiveness of legislation, aligning it with legal principles and standards (Tolman, 2022). It should be noticed that the organizational culture of bodies taking part in the technical side of the lawmaking process underlines the importance of learning, not only by individual people, but also of organizations. Lawmakers engage in comparative analysis by examining existing acts and legal frameworks to make informed decisions. By learning from similar legislation within the legal system, lawmakers can identify best practices, evaluate the effectiveness of previous laws, and avoid duplicative or conflicting provisions. Comparative analysis enables lawmakers to leverage knowledge gained from experience, both domestically and internationally, thereby promoting evidence-based lawmaking and fostering continuous learning.

Viewing the lawmaking process from the perspective of learning highlights the dynamics of legislative activities. Lawmakers engage in knowledge acquisition, information assimilation, and critical analysis throughout the process, which allows them to gain a deeper understanding of the given issues, take into account the views of stakeholders, and refine legislation accordingly. This approach ensures that laws are responsive to societal needs, grounded in evidence and expertise, and capable of addressing emerging challenges effectively. Many problems concerning the quality of law are directly related to a lack of the necessary information, knowledge and skills about the law, the lawmaking process and about issues regulated by various legal acts.

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**SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMPONENTS OF SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY OF INDUSTRIAL COMPANIES IN THE
CONDITIONS OF A DIGITAL AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY**

Sociální a environmentální složky společenské odpovědnosti průmyslových podniků v podmínkách digitální a udržitelné ekonomiky

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Abstract: The article analyses the main tools for companies to achieve competitiveness, specifically social development and environmental safety, which determine the socio-ecological vector of activity and further development of companies. The transformation of human value orientations is accompanied by excessive accumulation of material goods, whose processes of manufacturing, exploitation and utilization significantly disturb the natural balance, worsen the ecological situation, and dramatically reduce the natural resources of the planet, which negatively affects the quality of food, drinking water and air and, as a result, the health and life expectancy in the modern world. The introduction of effective measures to stop and further prevent these trends has become one of the relevant vectors for the prospective development of an effective business environment in the developed countries of the world, which recognize the priority issues of environmental safety, environmental protection, and social security of basic human needs. Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that the achievement of the socio-ecological vector of the activity of industrial companies depends on the observance of the principles of a balanced social and environmental policy of corporate activities, which are defined by the authors as the major ones.

Key words: socio-ecological vector, social and environmental policy, principles of effective functioning.

Abstrakt: Článek zkoumá hlavní páky pro dosažení konkurenceschopného stavu podniků – sociální rozvoj a environmentální bezpečnost, které určují sociálně-ekologický vektor činnosti a další rozvoj podniků. Transformace hodnotových orientací člověka je doprovázena nadměrnou akumulací hmotných statků, jejichž procesy výroby, exploatace a využívání výrazně narušily přírodní rovnováhu, zhoršily ekologickou situaci a katastrofálně snížily přírodní zdroje planety, což se negativně projevilo na kvalitě potravin, pitné vody a ovzduší a v důsledku toho i na zdraví a délce lidského života v moderním světě. Zavedení účinných opatření k zastavení a dalšímu zamezení těchto trendů se stalo jedním z relevantních vektorů perspektivního rozvoje efektivního podnikatelského prostředí ve vyspělých zemích světa, které uznávají prioritní otázky ekologické bezpečnosti, ochrany životního prostředí a sociálního zabezpečení základních lidských potřeb. Výsledky studie umožnily konstatovat, že dosažení sociálně-ekologického vektoru činnosti průmyslových podniků závisí na dodržování zásad, vyvážené sociální a environmentální politiky činnosti podniku, které autoři definují jako hlavní.

Klíčová slova: sociálně-ekologický vektor, sociální a environmentální politika, zásady efektivního fungování.

INTRODUCTION

The successful functioning of an industrial enterprise in modern conditions depends on a considerable number of factors; it is thus quite difficult to foresee the moment of occurrence, the extent and the specific direction of the influence of each of them. These difficulties are associated with constant changes and transformations in the market environment of the enterprise, significant limitations of the current legislative and regulatory framework governing the country's industrial sector of the economy, and a significant negative impact of crises, which have recently affected the direction of economic development at the micro, meso and macro levels. Under these conditions, online results that should be immediately put into practice can be only obtained through timely and objectively conducted diagnostics.

In addition to global social, economic, and environmental issues, the world is facing challenges related to dramatic technological changes in promotion, digitalization and automation. In response to these challenges, Industry 4.0, an information-driven production system technology (LASI, FETTKE, KEMPER, FELD, HOFFMANN, 2014), affects the organizational components of the economy such as productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness, as well as social and environmental constraints on sustainability (BONILLA, SILVA, TERRA DA SILVA, FRANCO GONÇALVES, SACOMANO, 2018).

The impact of Industry 4.0 will undoubtedly be significant large given the development of the global economy. The advent of Industry 4.0 has had a significant impact on the global economy and affected international business, which is transforming consumer benefits, improving asset quality by increasing data outputs, re-establishing relationships as learning the value of new ways of collaborating, digitally transforming existing models into new business models, especially open web platforms are creating new opportunities and increase competition (DI VAIO, VARRIALE, 2019).

Sustainability is also considered a major driver of Industry 4.0 (GEISSDOERFER, SAVAGET, BOCKEN, HULTINK, 2017). Industry 4.0 technologies can be integrated into value chains by collecting and actively sharing data to provide real-time information on the flows of machines, production, operations, and components; it helps managers to monitor, control and ensure sustainability decision to renew products when needed. These renewal-based

approaches replace the traditional linear approach, the philosophy of make, use and dispose of, with a circular approach that benefits the organization and supply chains socially, economically and environmentally (ONYSHCHENKO, SHEVCHUK, SHARA, KOVAL, DEMCHUK, 2022; KASYCH, ROWLADN, ONYSHCHENKO, 2019; POCHTOVYUK, SEMENIKHINA, ONYSHCHENKO, SHVETS, 2021).

The relevance of the research direction related to the assessment of the environmental impact of the activities carried out by industrial enterprises, and the existence of a direct relationship between its social and environmental characteristics, has been confirmed by studies from all over the world conducted in recent years. For example, A. Atkisson (2013), in justifying the four vectors of the "compass of sustainable development", attributes two of them to the social and environmental dimensions, thereby equating their significance and importance for corporate activities. In studies conducted under the auspices of the World Bank, D. Cheney, A. Zolotarev, D. Vine and A. Aridi (2017) define human capital as one of the six components of the ecosystem, thereby confirming the close relationship between social and environmental development.

Based on the analysis of the activities of multiple medium-sized industrial companies Ormazabal and J. M. Sarriegi (2012), prove the existence of a close relationship between environmental measures and consumer loyalty, competitors' activity and staff turnover of the company. In their work, L. M. D'Agostino and R. Moreno (2019) argue that the combination and achievement of economic, social and environmental goals of the enterprise is possible only on the basis of intensive implementation of technological innovations.

The authors prove that environmental innovations stimulate the development and implementation of general innovations in corporate activities, thereby enhancing the economic and social development of the company, the region, and the country as a whole. At the same time, the prospect of further research is to develop a strategy for companies to adjust their management policy by focusing on maximum environmental protection, preservation and restoration of ecosystems in the region, and the introduction of economic and reuse of natural resources and raw materials, which should be a condition for improving the quality and life expectancy of people in the country and on the planet.

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

To achieve the objective of the study and to realize the goals, a set of general scientific and special research methods was used in the work: semantic, critical and comparative analysis (to determine the essence of the concept of "employer brand"); regulatory approach (to outline

the legal framework for the socio-environmental vector of corporate activities); graphical analysis, contextual analysis and modelling (to illustrate the results of forecasting the socio-environmental activities of companies); data visualization (to assess the consistency of social and environmental activities of companies); and correlation and regression analysis (to illustrate the impact of factors on the resulting performance of enterprises).

RESULTS

In economic theory, there are many quantitative indicators to measure the performance and efficiency of the enterprise, each of which characterizes only a separate component of its activity, one or another aspect of its functioning over a certain period of time.

It is quite difficult to obtain a comprehensive result of the assessment of the actual position of an enterprise in the regional and national economy and to forecast its future development in the short, medium and long-term using only quantitative indicators. In addition, focusing solely on economic indicators will not provide a complete picture of the level of development and potential of the enterprise or the degree of its social responsibility, either. This requires using other approaches to assessment, which, in addition to quantitative indicators, are also based on qualitative indicators, specifically, the characteristics of the socio-environmental vector of development of the enterprise. An example of such an approach is the evaluation of the employer brand created by the enterprise in the market, which is generally characterized as «a positive image and trust, the perception of the enterprise as a reliable partner, responsible employer, attractive for its target audience today and in the future» (ZAKHAROVA, 2015). Each year, companies that have achieved significant success in the process of building their own employer brand are included in the Global 2000 list of the World's Best Employers list, compiled by US magazine Forbes together with Statista on the basis of technology global and regional surveys of respondents around the world and the development of a large number of recommendations for employment. (THE WORLD'S BEST EMPLOYERS 2019 LIST, 2019). According to 2021 results, no Ukrainian company was included in the world's best employers list, which indicates the lack of attention of the Ukrainian business environment paid to the process of building a successful employer brand and the need to adapt to the world's leading companies' experience accumulated in this area. For this purpose, the paper analyses the activities of companies that annually rank first in the world's best employers list (see Table 1).

Table 1: Leaders in the world’s best employers rating

Company	Country	Industry	Top 100 Digital Companies Ranking	Ranking of the Top 50 World's Most Innovative Companies	Ranking place Global
<u>Alphabet</u>	USA	Computer services	4	1	17
<u>Microsoft</u>	USA	Software and Programming	2	4	16
<u>Red Hat</u>	USA	Software and Programming	48	24 according to 2018 rankings	1464
<u>Apple</u>	USA	Computer hardware	1	3	6

Source: The world’s best employers 2019 list. The Most Innovative Companies 2019.

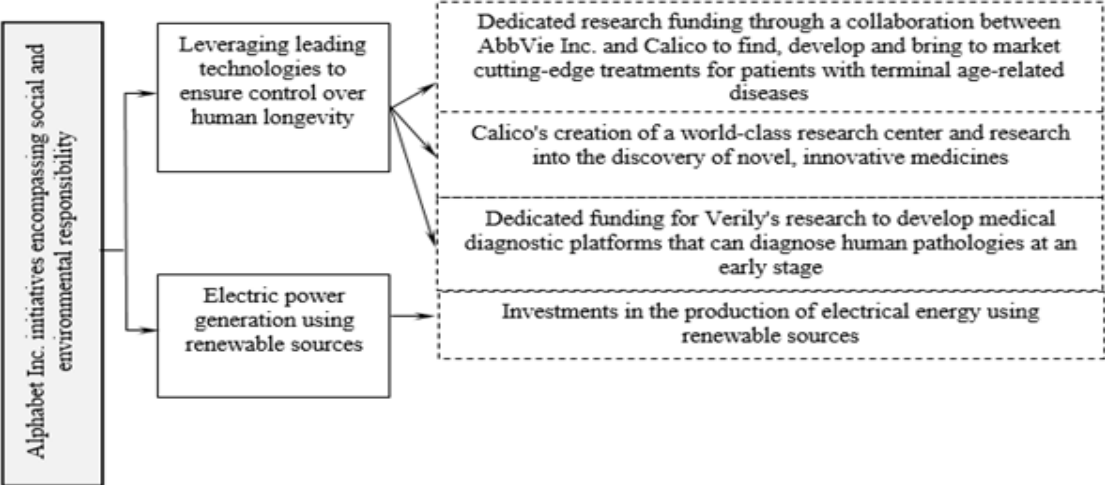
All five companies in the Top 5 world's best employers operate in different fields of the same industry - the digital industry, which clearly indicates the already established and mature development vector of the modern global business environment. In addition, all companies are regularly included in the Top 50 Digital Companies, which indicates their strong technological level and high competitiveness in today’s global digital market. Together, this allowed three (Alphabet, Apple and Microsoft) out of five companies to enter the Top 4 World's Most Innovative Companies, which characterizes them as the world’s largest innovators. That is why a detailed study of the vectors of social and environmental development of these companies should provide an opportunity to establish generalized principles of effective and socially responsible direction of a modern enterprise, which in the future should be adapted and faster implemented in the activities of the Ukrainian business entities.

The initial research knowledge base was the data available on the official websites of each of the five leading companies listed in the world's best employers ranking. Generalization and further processing of this information allowed drawing conclusions in the context of our study.

The American company Alphabet Inc. was established in October 2015 as a parent holding company that combines several subsidiaries such as Google, Calico, CapitalG, Chronicle, DeepMind, Google Fiber, GV, Jigsaw, and others (ALPHABET, 2019). The mission of Alphabet Inc. was to empower people through smarter use of data. Alphabet Inc. is purposefully selecting specialized companies to buy and invest in their technological development. A detailed analysis of the last quarterly report available on the company’s website enabled formulating the main vectors of the holding company’s activity in line with the socio-ecological direction (see Figure 1).

As a result, it can be stated that the main vector of social responsibility of Alphabet Inc. is focused on ensuring a healthy, full, and long life for people and the production of electricity using renewable sources.

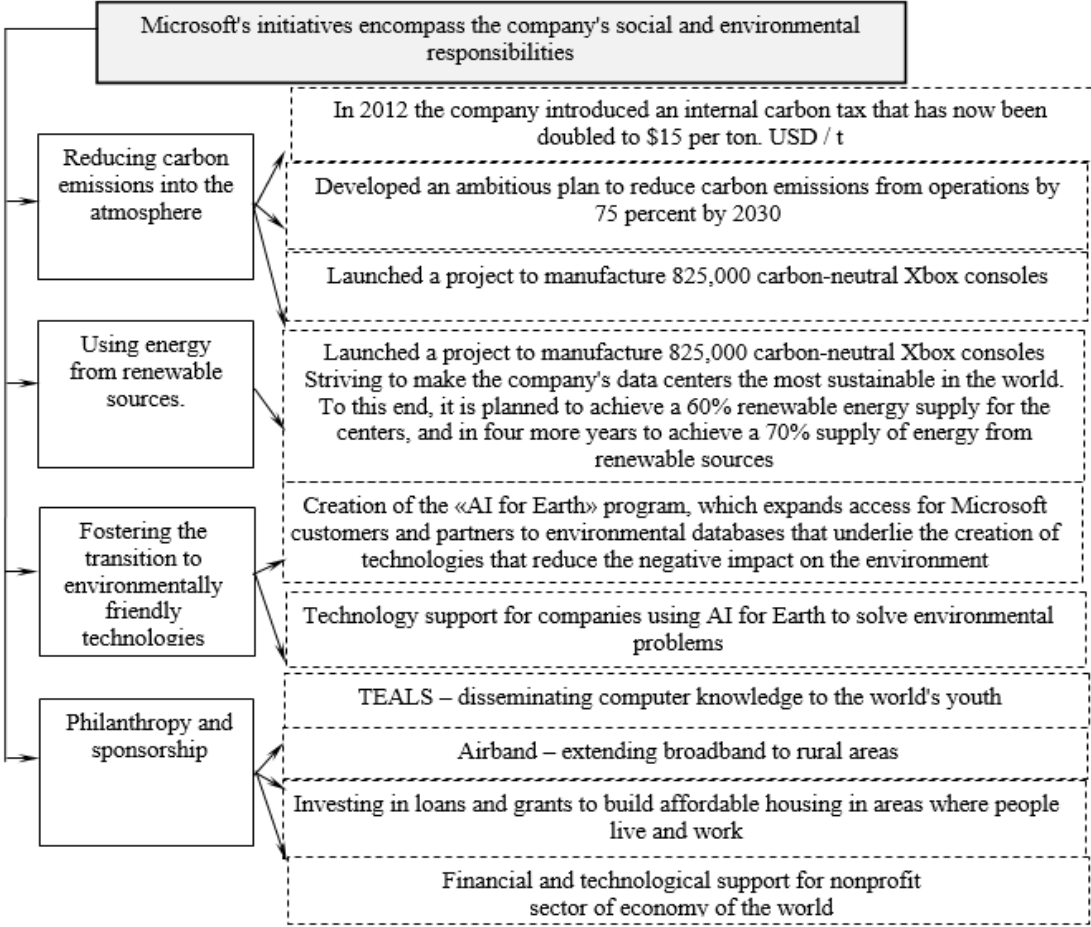
Figure 1: Socio-environmental guidelines for the activities of Alphabet Inc



Sources: Official website of Alphabet. Alphabet Inc. Quarterly report.

The multinational corporation Microsoft Corporation was founded in October 1976 and is headquartered in Raymond, USA. The company’s mission is to encourage every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. The company's culture is based on a continuous process of engaging young professionals in the development of software products, which considerable investments in finding, attracting and professionally developing talents each year. The company emphasizes a high direct correlation between the financial and economic success of its business and its ability to attract and retain talented employees. That is why the company’s priority is the physical, emotional, and financial well-being of employees and their families. The company generates and implements a wide range of initiatives along the socio-ecological vector of development (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Socio-environmental guidelines for activities of Microsoft



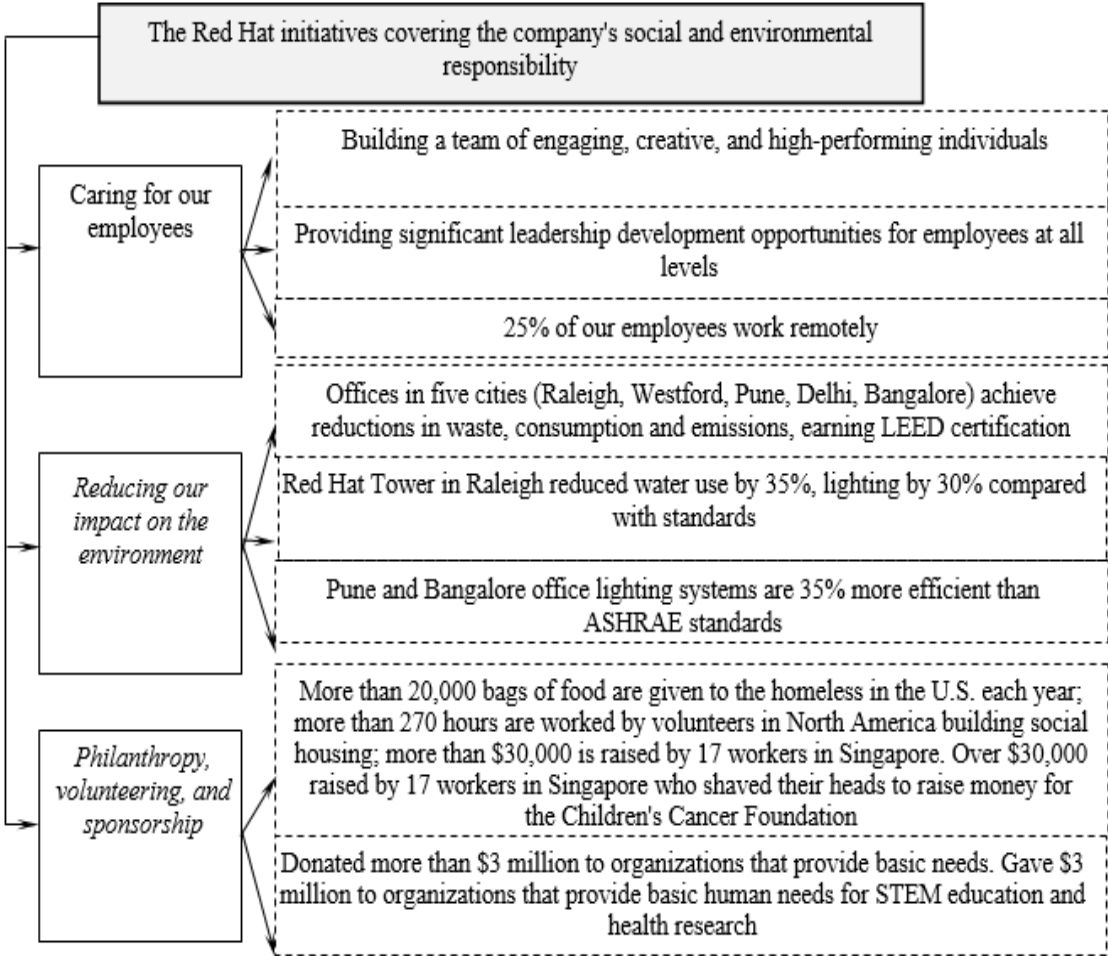
Sources: Official website of Microsoft.

Microsoft defines its motto as follows: a person must be proficient in modern technology in order to be prepared for the future as well as possible (MICROSOFT, 2019).

Red Hat existed from 1995 to 2019 and was taken over by IVM Corporation. The company's mission is to create open-source software that is expected to continue to unlock the world's potential and create a better foundation for the future of IT. Initiatives involving the company's social and environmental responsibility are shown in Figure 2.

The vector of Red Hat's professional development provides all market participants with technologies that enable successful adaptation and solution of existing problems, which is also part of its corporate social responsibility.

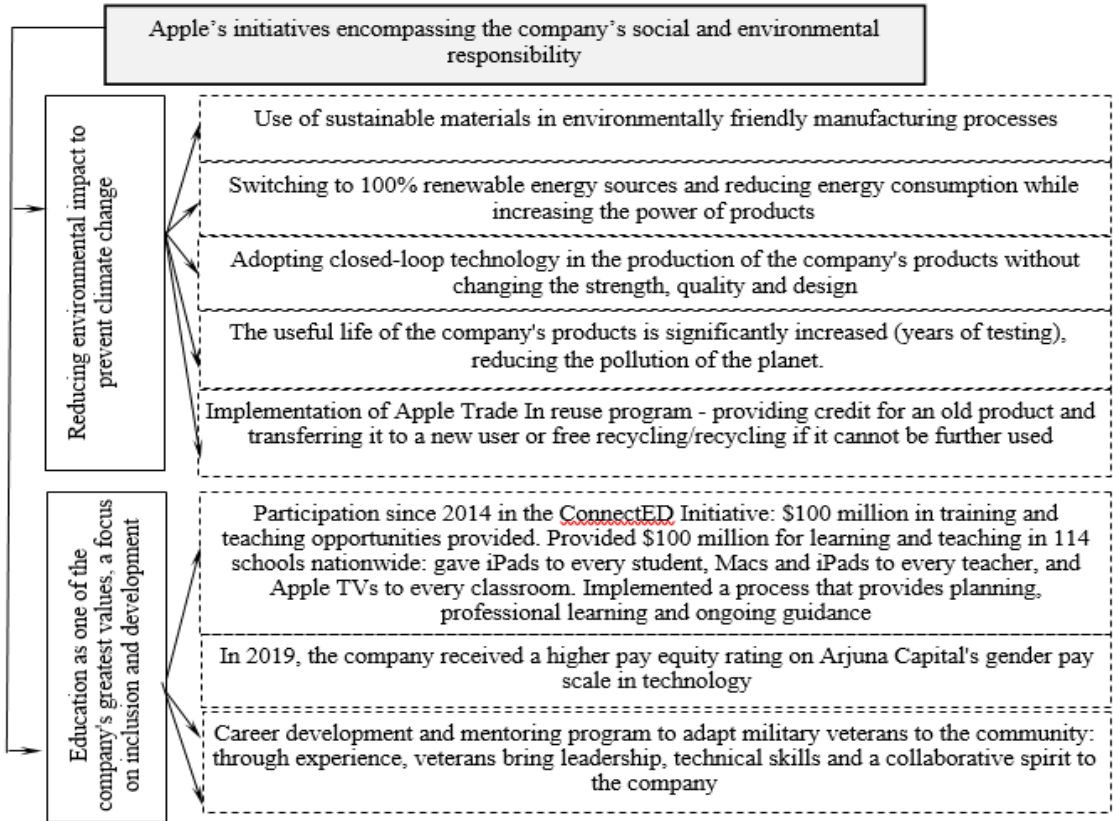
Figure 3: Socio-environmental vector for Red Hat’s activities



Sources: Official website of Red Hat.

The set goal of Apple Corporation is to manufacture products without extracting any new fossils from the ground. In order to achieve this ambitious goal, the company’s specialists are continuously developing new and innovative technologies for recycling materials, while adhering to strict environmental and health requirements (Figure 4). The company's mission is to make the best products in the world while helping to improve the environment.

Figure 4: Socio-environmental vector for Apple’s operations



Source: Official website of Apple.

In order to predict the degree of changes in the values of the main resulting indicator which the trends of changes in other final indicators of the company's activities were derived from (using the example of the mining enterprise "Kvarts"), specifically labour productivity, calculations were carried out using models that describe the impact of the three most significant factor characteristics (number of employees with five or more years of experience in this enterprise; the number of employees hired; number of new employees who remained working in the company after one year). The calculations were based on the hypothesis that the corresponding numerical indicator would change by 1.0% in the range from -10.0 to +10.0% (Table 2).

Table 2: Calculations of predicted changes in the level of labour productivity and production volume*

N	K ₁	P ₁	V ₁	K ₂	P ₂	V ₂	K ₃	P ₃	V ₃
-10	151.20	2085037.05	1071053.2	79.2	338923.3	88544.45	72	281286.30	68890.47
-9	152.88	1914101.40	943534.74	80.08	362704.8	96429.22	72.8	309617.10	78353.49
-8	154.56	1748763.63	824624.89	80.96	387175.2	104558.52	73.6	338813.96	88122.22
-7	156.24	1589023.73	714323.62	81.84	412334.6	112932.35	74.4	368876.90	98196.67
-6	157.92	1434881.70	612630.92	82.72	438183.0	121550.72	75.2	399805.92	108576.82
-5	159.60	1286337.56	519546.79	83.6	464720.3	130413.63	76	431601.00	119262.68
-4	161.28	1143391.28	435071.24	84.48	491946.6	139521.06	76.8	464262.15	130254.26
-3	162.96	1006042.88	359204.27	85.36	519861.9	148873.03	77.6	497789.37	141551.54
-2	164.64	874292.36	291945.87	86.24	548466.1	158469.54	78.4	532182.67	153154.54
-1	166.32	748139.71	233296.05	87.12	577759.3	168310.58	79.2	567442.03	165063.24
0	168.00	627584.93	183254.80	88	607741.5	178396.15	80	603567.47	177277.66
1	169.68	512628.03	141822.13	88.88	638412.7	188726.26	80.8	640558.98	189797.79
2	171.36	403269.01	108998.03	89.76	669772.8	199300.89	81.6	678416.55	202623.63
3	173.04	299507.86	84782.51	90.64	701821.9	210120.07	82.4	717140.20	215755.18
4	174.72	201344.58	69175.56	91.52	734559.9	221183.78	83.2	756729.92	229192.44
5	176.40	108779.18	62177.19	92.4	767987.0	232492.02	84	797185.71	242935.41
6	178.08	91811.66	63787.39	93.28	802103.0	244044.79	84.8	838507.57	256984.09
7	179.76	59557.99	74006.18	94.16	836907.9	255842.10	85.6	880695.51	271338.49
8	181.44	35329.77	92833.53	95.04	872401.9	267883.95	86.4	923749.51	285998.59
9	183.12	25503.67	120269.46	95.92	908584.8	280170.32	87.2	967669.58	300964.41
10	184.8	20079.69	156313.97	96.8	945456.7	292701.24	88	1012455.7	316235.93

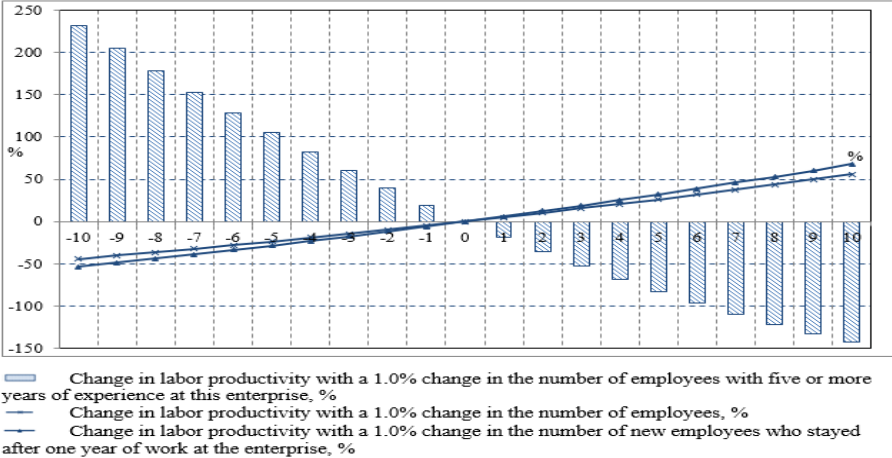
N - change in the indicator, %, K₁ - number of employees with work experience, persons, P₁ – labour productivity, UAH per person, V₁ – production volume, thousand UAH, K₂ - number of hired employees, persons, P₂ - labour productivity, UAH / person, V₂ - production volume, thousand UAH, K₃ - number of new employees, P₃ - labour productivity, UAH/person, V₃ - production volume, thousand UAH. *Depending on a change of 1.0% in the range from +10.0% to -10.0% of the three factor attributes, carried out within the socio-ecological vector of the enterprise's activity according to the data of 2018-2020.

Source: Own calculations using data from the mining enterprise "Kvarts".

The calculations show that the indicators K₁ and V₁ are inversely related to the resulting attribute. That is, with a 1.0% increase in the number of employees who have worked at the enterprise for five years or more, labour productivity decreases by 18.3 %, while a 1.0% decrease leads to an increase in labour productivity by 19.2 % (Figure 5, Figure 6).

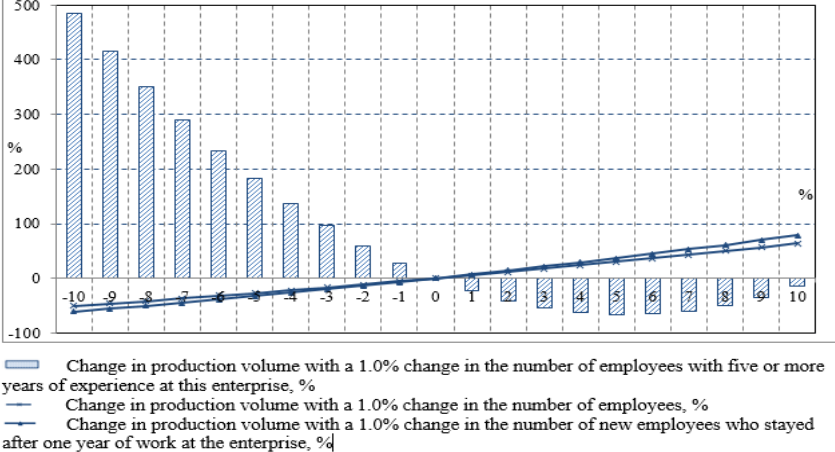
Therefore, it can be concluded that the development of an effective personnel strategy of the enterprise will allow, *ceteris paribus*, to maintain and enhance the positive dynamics of labour productivity and production volume growth, which should gradually lead the enterprise out of loss and improve the financial and economic condition of the enterprise.

Figure 5: Calculations of predicted changes in labour productivity in the case of a 1.0% change in the three factor characteristics most significant for the conditions of the enterprise identified during the study of the socio-ecological vector



Sources: Own calculations using data from the mining enterprise "Kvarts".

Figure 6: Calculations of predicted possible changes in the production volume in the case of a 1.0% change in the three most significant factors for the conditions of the enterprise identified during the study of the socio-environmental vector



Sources: Own calculations using data from the mining enterprise "Kvarts".

DISCUSSION

The study of the characteristics of the five best employers in the world according to The world’s best employers list shows only the most striking examples of socio-environmental vectors of development, while social and environmental responsibility is much deeper, more diverse and is a priori the basis of the philosophy of each of the companies under study. This finding cannot be simply applied to the situation in Ukraine; it is advisable to generalize the principles of socio-environmental vector of development of world leaders, the gradual adoption

of which by Ukrainian enterprises as the guiding and fundamental strategy will create the preconditions for building their own socially responsible business environment.

In this context, the following basic principles for successful functioning of enterprises in the direction of socio-environmental support shall be pointed out as follows:

1. The economic approach to the environment is a strategic shift towards the rational use of natural resources based on the introduction of innovative waste management technologies, a closed water cycle, the transition of production to renewable energy sources and the prevention of any harmful emission into the external environment by the company's activities. The objective of the activity is to minimize the negative impact on the planet while maximizing the efforts to get rid of pollution, to prevent the extinction of many biological species, and to avoid the consequences of technogenic disasters.

2. Balanced use of all production factors – socially responsible policy of enterprise activities should be based on the rational use of all production resources, including human resources. This is conditioned by the adoption of parity management decisions, which, according to the management grid of R. Bleiko and J. S. Mouton, meet the diagonal positions in the range 5.5-10.10 and enable creating favourable conditions for the harmonious development of all components of corporate activities.

3. Lifelong professional development of employees and focus on talents – introduction of a differentiated continuous system of professional training, internships, and advanced training for all categories of employees; creation of favourable environment for attracting talents and developing talented employees, which will allow the enterprise to build a competitive position at the regional and international levels. A people-centred approach should be based on the principles of ensuring equal access to public benefits for all people in the region, country, and planet and providing opportunities to discover leadership qualities and talents.

4. Social dialogue and public responsibility – establishing an effective system of constructive interaction between the enterprise and the regional authorities and the local community in whose territory it is located, which is based on its active participation in public life and solving the most pressing socio-economic and environmental problems of the territory. Charity, volunteering, and sponsorship activities should become the basis for the financial and economic stability and progress of the enterprise.

Modern life imposes certain requirements on the activities of economic entities, giving socio-environmental characteristics to the style and content of its management. At present, successful enterprises of the developed world, in their efforts to become economically efficient, adopt voluntarily the principles of corporate social responsibility, especially in terms of

compliance with environmental safety standards and creating favourable conditions for the social needs of people. Adapting this approach to the environment of Ukrainian enterprises will allow laying the foundations for stabilizing the regional and national economy and becoming an impetus for the socio-economic development of the country. Therefore, further research should focus on developing an adaptation mechanism of the world's leading experience accumulated in the field of socio-environmental aspect of enterprise management to the conditions of Ukrainian enterprises.

The four principles of effective functioning of the socio-environmental sphere for Ukrainian enterprises should be perceived as immutable rules, the continuous implementation of which enables the implementation of socially responsible development strategy of small, medium-sized and large enterprises in Ukraine in order to achieve economic growth and overcome the consequences of crisis while not to be limited exclusively to the principles based on foreign experience. In addition, it should be noted that major Ukrainian enterprises have developed their own strategy for social and environmental vectors of development, the specification and further compliance with which will allow creating the outlines of effective socially responsible activity of domestic industrial enterprises.

CONCLUSION

Systematization of the findings of the study enabled determining the orientation of the development strategies of major industrial enterprises of Ukraine officially recognized as the best employers in order to address social and environmental problems of society. At the same time, the specified orientation, firstly, is exclusively of a local character and applies only to the territory and population in the immediate vicinity of the production capacities of the enterprise and, secondly, concerns the prevention of possible future negative impact of the production on the environment without declaring the readiness of the enterprise to take part in the liquidation of the harm already caused by people to the nature and society. Other social and environmental problems of the region, the country, and the world are for the most part of no interest to Ukrainian enterprises due to limited financial resources and constant search for ways to survive in the current financial, economic, and socio-political crisis Ukraine has to face now.

The improvement of the social, financial and economic condition of an enterprise should be the key to paying more attention to the environmental impact of production and economic activity of the enterprises on the quality and life expectancy of people in the territory where the production facilities are located. This will enable an even greater reduction in the amount of the

specific costs of environmental block indicators that determine various aspects of the environmental impact of the company's production activities. Depending on the personnel strategy chosen by the management of the enterprise, i.e., on the comprehensive support of which category of personnel the main efforts will be focused on, this will ultimately determine the potentially possible production volumes, and hence the specific values of the indicators of the environmental impact of the enterprise on the environment. Similar calculations can be carried out, firstly, for any level of change in the number of employees, both in terms of its growth and decrease, and, secondly, for any of the three indicators of the number of employees, which are characteristics of the factors.

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**CURRENT STATE OF THE RESOURCE COMPONENT
OF ECONOMIC POTENTIAL BY THE EXAMPLE OF UKRAINIAN
FOOD ENTERPRISES**

Současný stav složek zdrojů ekonomického potenciálu na příkladu ukrajinských
potravinářských podniků

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ABSTRACT: This objective of the paper is to determine the status of the region's enterprise resource potential using a component analysis. For this purpose, the leading food industry enterprises in the Poltava region were chosen as the most resistant to the current changing economic conditions. Based on the results of financial, material, technical and human resources indicators, a list of strengths (operational efficiency, financial and economic stability, effective material and technical support, efficiency of inventory management, high labour productivity, favourable psychological climate in the team) and weaknesses (inefficient asset liquidity management, deficit of own working capital, high degree of equipment wear and tear, high cost of property maintenance, reduction of personnel costs, lack of material motivation) of the research objects is compiled. It was found that in order to improve the state of food industry enterprises resource potential in the Poltava region, it is necessary to update fixed assets, modernize the equipment, improve the qualification of personnel, as well as to introduce innovations.

Key words: resource potential, enterprise, food industry, SWOT analysis.

ABSTRAKT: Cílem tohoto článku je zjistit stav potenciálu podnikových zdrojů v regionu prostřednictvím analýzy hlavních komponent jeho hlavních složek. Pro tento účel byly vybrány přední podniky potravinářského průmyslu v Poltavské oblasti, které jsou nejodolnější vůči současným měnícím se ekonomickým podmínkám. Na základě výsledků finančních, materiálně-technických a personálních ukazatelů je sestaven seznam silných (provozní efektivnost, finanční a ekonomická stabilita, efektivní materiálně-technické zabezpečení, efektivnost řízení zásob, vysoká produktivita práce, příznivé psychologické klima v kolektivu) a slabých stránek (neefektivní řízení likvidity majetku, deficit vlastního provozního kapitálu, vysoký stupeň opotřebení zařízení, vysoké náklady na údržbu majetku, snížení osobních nákladů, nedostatečná materiální motivace) objektů výzkumu. Bylo zjištěno, že pro zlepšení stavu zdrojového potenciálu potravinářských podniků v Poltavské oblasti je nutná aktualizace základních prostředků, modernizace zařízení, zvýšení kvalifikace personálu a také zavádění inovací.

Klíčová slova: potenciál zdrojů, podnik, potravinářský průmysl, SWOT analýza.

INTRODUCTION

Continuous monitoring of the current state of enterprises resource potential at the regional level is of particular importance due to the significance of predictive data on real opportunities and hidden reserves to be able to identify negative or positive impacts on the development of the Ukrainian regional economy. In particular, the determination of resource opportunities is a priority direction of any economic entity's strategy in conditions of economic instability. The study of the resource potential of food industry enterprises is of particular interest for research, as it shows the greatest resilience to the today's reality. Accordingly, the prospects of the development and functioning of the country's food industry are always relevant and priority (CHEREDNICHENKO, O., 2020, p. 13).

The dynamics of the external environment and the high level of competition in the food market requires considering the dynamics indicators of the enterprises resource potential structural elements. The results of their analysis are in demand both from the scientific community and by representatives of the business community. Compared to other countries, Ukraine has the most favourable natural, human, geopolitical, and resource potential for the development of the food industry, the rational use of which would ensure Ukraine a leading position in the global and regional food markets (ZHUKOV, V., STARKOVA, O., 2019, p. 556).

The use of the resource potential of the agro-industrial complex enterprises, its formation, economic evaluation, optimization, and development is the subject of research conducted e.g., by Vasylenko S. and Bezditko O. (2020), Khromushyna L., Konieva I., Skrypnyk Yu., Shalyhina I. (2018), Nesterchuk Yu., Butko N. and Umanska V. (2019), Kharchenko V. and Kharchenko H. (2018), Gerasimchuk O. (2021), Rusali M. A. (2020) and others. Most scientific research in this field is characterized by the efforts to solve the problems related to effective management of resource potential, as well as optimal provision of the necessary resources.

It shall be pointed out that this is one of the most urgent and difficult challenges not only from a scientific, but also a practical point of view. A critical review of literature sources focused on identifying the state of resource potential of food industry enterprises at the regional level enabled drawing a conclusion that they are exhaustive. However, Nashkerska M. M. et al. emphasize that in order to make effective decisions, company management needs information about the market potential of the enterprise in general as well as its potential components (NASHKERSKA M. M., SKYBINSKA Z. M., SKYBINSKYI O. S., 2019, p. 47). Statistical data evaluation is necessary for providing analytical support for strategic decision-making in all management systems (operational, current, prospective, investment, or innovative) that are

related to the economic management system of the enterprise. Thus, monitoring the state of the resource potential of the region's enterprises requires a deeper analysis. The relevance of the chosen problem and the need to formulate practical recommendations aimed at ensuring a balanced growth of the regional economy determined the choice of the research topic.

METHODOLOGY AND AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The objective of this paper is to determine the current state of the resource potential of the region's food enterprises on the basis of a structured evaluation of its components in order to identify the main development trends, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

The theoretical basis of the study is the basic provisions of economic theory, scientific and analytical works of domestic and foreign economists who deal with the problem of the efficient use of the enterprises resource potential, as well as the evaluation of its individual components both at the micro and macro levels.

The instrumental and methodological apparatus of research is represented by general scientific methods such as abstract-logical (to define «resource potential of the enterprise»); economic and statistical (to analyse the current state of enterprises operating in the region and assess their resource potential); calculation and analytical (to identify the evaluation indicators of the regional enterprises resource potential); SWOT-analysis (to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the business environment); the method of graphical representation of information.

The calculation part of the study is presented in the form of a comprehensive methodology for assessing the efficiency of using the resource potential of an enterprise, which presents some of the main indicators for these groups such as:

- indicators characterizing material and technical resources: capital productivity, coefficients of disposal, growth, renewal, replacement, suitability of fixed production assets and the use of technological equipment, the share of material costs in the production cost, production yield percentage;
- indicators characterizing labor resources: turnover rates for recruitment and departure of personnel, staff turnover, staff constancy, educational level of the enterprise's personnel, etc.;
- indicators characterizing financial resources: profit, FI ratio, current and absolute liquidity, ROE, ROA etc.

Completion of the analysis of the use of the resource potential of the researched food enterprises was the creation of summary tables of its strengths and weaknesses.

The information base of the research was compiled by the authors by summarizing primary materials of economic analysis, internal and accounting corporate documentation of regional food industry enterprises, the results of their financial statements, as well as official data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The definition of resource potential consists in understanding it as the basis and catalyst for the development of food industry enterprises characterized by a set of indicators reflecting available resources or reserves and can be realized under certain market management conditions. According to economists, the category of «resource potential» should be considered at the national and regional levels (ZAIKA, K., POCHTOVYUK, A., BURIK, I., 2021, p. 1). The authors conducted a study on resource potential and the level of its use on the example of food industry enterprises in the Poltava region. The production of food products, beverages, tobacco products plays a major role in the economy of the region.

The resource potential of regional enterprises is organizational and economic relations between organizations to achieve synergistic effect with optimal use of regional resources: intellectual capital; property of enterprises; material resources. The nature of these relations is determined by the variability of the internal and external environment of the infrastructure of region economic entities, in which the role of their resource potential is to find and implement internal sources of self-development to ensure stable activity.

According to official statistical indicators, the volume of products generated by the manufacturing industry increased by 23.6 % as of January 2022. This includes a 3.6% increase in the production of beverages, food and tobacco products. The share of the food industry in the value of products of generated by the manufacturing industry was 36 % (MAIN DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS IN POLTAVA REGION, 2022).

The food industry in the Poltava region is represented by 18 sub-sectors: milk production – 16 enterprises, meat processing – 18 enterprises (4 enterprises more than last year); sugar – 5 enterprises; oil and fat – 4 enterprises; flour and grain mill – 10 enterprises; fruit canning – 3 enterprises; production of bread and bakery products – 23 enterprises (3 enterprises more than last year); production of confectionery, biscuits, cakes – 11 enterprises (their number increased by 4 during the year); production of mineral water and other non-alcoholic beverages – 3 enterprises (AGROPORAL, 2020).

The official data of the Main Department of Statistics in the Poltava region enable analysing the dynamics of industrial products production by types for 2015–2020 by food industry enterprises (Table 1).

Table 1: Dynamics of production of food industry by main types of products in Poltava region

Product type, thousand tons	Year						2020 to 2015, %
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
Meat (beef and veal)	3.2	4.6	4.3	4.2	3.5	4.1	128.13
Sausage products	36.3	33.3	36.2	35.4	32.4	*	89.26*
Whole milk and heavy cream	45.4	42.1	38.4	38.6	37.4	35.2	77.53
Fat cheese	14.6	13.6	13.6	15.1	16.1	11.2	76.71
Sunflower oil	226.4	230.3	268	275.5	306	*	135.16*
Granulated sugar, including beet sugar	209.6	297.8	230.8	222.6	182	168.8	80.53
Wheat or wheat-rye flour	86.5	82.9	55.4	34.1	30.9	27.8	32.14
Bread and bakery products	33.6	35.7	32.5	29	28.9	26.6	79.17
Confectionery	7.1	7.5	7.9	6.4	6.5	*	91.55*
Natural mineral carbonated waters, million deal.	11.9	12.2	13	16.3	16.5	*	138.66*

Notes: * – data not publicly available; calculations were made from 2019 to 2015.

Source: Own calculations using data from the Main Department of Statistics in Poltava region.

According to the results of the analysis, the enterprises of meat products, unrefined oil and mineral waters increased their production volumes most actively. The most developed are the meat processing industry (meat processing plants in Poltava, Kremenchuk, Lubny, Myrhorod, Pyriatyn, Hadiach), sugar (Lokhvytsia, Kobeliaky, Yaresky, etc.), and dairy (Poltava, Kremenchuk, etc.). Negative dynamics was recorded in the case of flour-producing enterprises due to technically obsolete equipment and rising prices of wheat.

Leading enterprises in their field of operation as PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso», Pyriatinsky cheese factory and PJSC «Danon Kremez» are characterized by positive dynamics of production, and the results of their activities in the field of their operation are of strategic importance for the economic development of the Poltava region. This led to the choice of research objects (Table 2).

Table 2: Analysis of the enterprises resource potential of food industry enterprises in Poltava region

Enterprise name	Main type of activity	Sales volumes of the main types of products in 2019, tons
PJSC «Danone Kremez»	10.51 Milk processing, butter and cheese production	57527
PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso»	10.13 Production of meat products	10075.2
Piryatin Cheese Factory	10.51 Milk processing, butter and cheese production	8197.7

Source: Own calculations using data from the Main department of statistics in Poltava region.

Given that the enterprise resource potential is a combination of fixed assets, working capital and human resources, the evaluation of its effectiveness involves the evaluation of the use of each component. It is proved that the effectiveness of resource potential management can only be achieved under the assumption of meeting the effective criterion of the effective management of its individual elements (GONCHAR, M. V., 2016). The analysis of the financial potential of food industry in the region was carried out on the basis of data from annual reports on the financial results of the studied sample of enterprises. Table 3 shows a comparison of the dynamics of the cost factor fluctuation of the products sold by their main types.

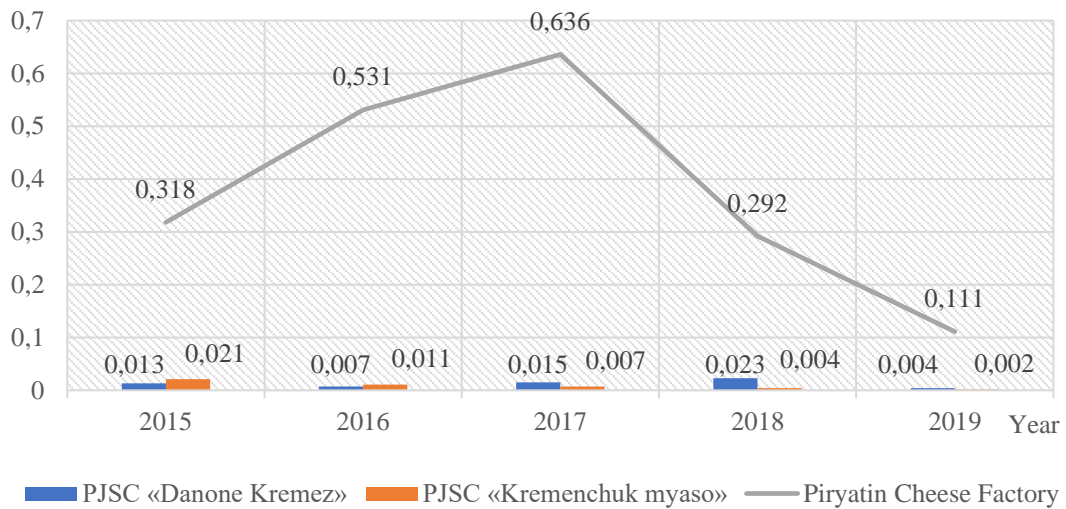
The results of the evaluation show the high efficiency of the main operational activities of the studied enterprises in the region. The dynamics of fluctuations of this indicator is at the level of <1 , which indicates the creation of an additional inflow of funds resulting from operational activities. Figure 1 shows the dynamics of liquidity indicators.

Table 3: Calculation of the cost factor of the main types of products of the food industry enterprises in Poltava region

Enterprise name	Calculation period					Optimal value
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
PJSC «Danone Kremez»	0.78	0.80	0.92	0.82	0.87	<1
PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso»	0.73	0.71	0.78	0.80	0.84	<1
Piryatin Cheese Factory	0.87	0.84	0.84	0.90	0.91	<1

Source: Own calculations using data from the enterprises annual financial report.

Figure 1: Dynamics of absolute liquidity ratio of food industry enterprises in Poltava region



Source: Own calculations using data from the enterprises annual financial report.

The calculated value of Piryatin Cheese Factory in 2019 is 0.1, which is a sufficient value. In 2019, the absolute liquidity ratio of PJSC «Danon Kremez» decreased by 0.019 compared to 2018; however, it is at an acceptable level. PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso» turns out to be less liquid compared to previous years, which is a consequence of problems in ensuring savings and resource conservation.

The analysis of financing sources includes analysing the financial potential of enterprises in the region. In 2019, PJSC «Danon Kremez» saw a decrease in capital, and a reduction in current liabilities, which was a positive point. Equity represented the largest share in the structure of financing sources. The activity of Piryatin Cheese Factory is financed from its own funds and partly from debt capital. A positive trend can be observed in the decrease in the amount of attracted capital by 15.30% in 2019 compared to 2018. In 2019, PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso» reported the largest accounts receivable in the amount of UAH 155.32 million, which was 28.2 % due to non-return of money for products sold by regional retail chains.

Material and technical base, production capacity of any enterprise depends on its technical resources (SAVINA, S. S., 2020, p. 20). The study of the material and technical potential state of the investigated enterprises based on financial statements enabled drawing the following conclusions:

- The total amount of fixed assets of PJSC «Danon Kremez» is gradually increasing due to the increase in the number of components such as machinery and equipment for production purposes, and buildings and structures for non-production purposes. The equipment is regularly

updated, and there is regular inspection of fixed assets with preference given to the latest models.

- The depreciation coefficient of fixed assets of PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso» is above the norm, and the coefficient of renewal in 2019 showed a negative value. This is a negative trend, and fixed assets need constant updating, modernization, or implementation of modern resource-saving equipment.

- In 2018, the value of non-current assets of Piryatin Cheese Factory increased by UAH 1,958,000 (2.54 %). A slight increase in non-current assets indicates poor technical equipment of the enterprise and increased wear and tear of fixed assets, which negatively affects the financial potential of the enterprise.

Effective creation and use of human potential is a prerequisite for building and developing strengths and competitive advantage of enterprises (SAJBIDOROVA, M., LUSNAKOVA, Z., DOBISOVA, M., 2016). The study of employee potential structure based on management reports on the evaluation objects revealed the following trends:

- PJSC «Danon Kremez» shows a positive dynamics of the average registered number of employees. In 2019, the average monthly salary of employees increased by UAH 5,659 compared to 2018. There was also an increase in the wage bill by UAH 25,963.1 thousand.

- The level of staff turnover at PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso» exceeds the normative value. The wage system is inefficient in terms of competitiveness. The company offers a social package for its staff, as well as basic training for employees but does not allocate sufficient funds for this purpose. The structure of production costs was dominated by material and labour costs, which amounted to 60.3 % and 20%, respectively in 2019.

- In 2020, Piryatin Cheese Factory increased the wage bill by UAH 1,753,000. compared to the previous year, regardless of Covid-19 and quarantine conditions. The enterprise personnel potential is a competitive advantage among enterprises in the region. Due to the increase in labour productivity, there was an increase in the average monthly wage.

Thus, the authors proposed to complete the analysis of the current state of the researched enterprises resource potential in the Poltava region by grouping their strengths and weaknesses into a summary table of the SWOT analysis (Table 4).

Table 4: Strengths and weaknesses of the food industry enterprises resource potential in Poltava region - SWOT analysis

		Object of research		
		Indicator	PJSC «Danon Kremez»	PJSC «Kremenchuk myaso»
STRENGTHS	Financial potential			
	Operational efficiency	+	+	+
	Effectiveness of asset liquidity management	+	-	+
	Financial and economic stability	+	-	+
	Material and technical potential			
	Powerful material and technical support	+	-	-
	High return on material and technical resources	+	+	+
	Low degree of wear and tear of fixed assets	+	-	-
	Effectiveness of inventory management	+	+	+
	Personnel potential			
	High labour productivity	+	+	+
	Positive dynamics of the personnel structure	+	-	+
	Salary level	+	-	+
	Favourable psychological climate in the team	+	+	+
	Education and professional development	+	-	+
	WEAKNESSES	Financial potential		
Inefficient asset liquidity management		-	+	-
Financial instability		-	+	-
Working capital deficit		-	+	-
Material and technical potential				
Low level of material and technical support		-	+	+
High degree of equipment wear and tear		-	+	+
Inefficient use of real estate		-	+	+
High cost of property maintenance		-	-	+
Personnel potential				
Reduction of personnel costs		-	-	-
Lack of material motivation		-	+	-
Weak intellectualization of personnel			-	
High staff turnover rate	-	+	-	

Source: Authors.

The analysis of the current state of the resource potential in the researched sample of food industry enterprises in the Poltava region enabled the identification of the main trends in its use, as well as the determination of strengths and weaknesses in general and in terms of individual economic entities. This is important for both internal (management, staff) and external (shareholders, investors, or banks) stakeholders, as it allows determining the maximum capacity to achieve tactical and strategic goals. The main direction of increasing the level of use of the food industry enterprises resource potential in the Poltava region is the improvement of management and marketing, as well as the implementation of innovations that would increase the demand for products on the market. Currently, marketing innovation – the activity of identifying and promoting goods or technologies with significant new features and offering sustainable competitive advantages is a topical issue.

CONCLUSION

The present research focuses on the importance and extension of the existing research in the area of using the resource potential of enterprises in the given region in the conditions of constant economic changes. Insufficient attention paid to this issue at the level of enterprises leads to the fact that managers solve problems only of short-term nature. On the example of a sample of food industry enterprises in the Poltava region, a study was made on the state of the resource potential component structure: financial, material and technical, and personnel. This made it possible to compile a summary table of strengths and weaknesses using SWOT-analysis tool. Based on the research results, recommendations for innovating the use of marketing innovations were formulated. Further research should be focused on the evaluation of the resource potential of regional enterprises using epy methods of mathematical analysis.

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VEŘEJNÁ SPRÁVA, ŘÍZENÍ • PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, MANAGEMENT

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THE SYSTEM OF “CONTRACTS” IN THE MANAGEMENT OF MINISTERIAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR IN SLOVAKIA

System “smluv” v řízení resortních organizací ve školství na Slovensku

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ABSTRACT: Management in public administration is a relevant topic because public sector organizations have a strong responsibility to deliver public services while having to deal with a dynamic and turbulent environment and budgetary constraints. On the other hand, there is constant pressure on these organizations to innovate, improve performance and deliver modern, accessible services to citizens. The article focuses on the implementation of the system of contracts in the management of departmental organizations under the founder competence of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic, which covers a wide range of differently focused organizations.

Key words: ministry – departmental organization – government agency – performance contract.

ABSTRACT: Manažment vo verejnej správe patrí k aktuálnym témam, pretože organizácie verejného sektora majú veľkú zodpovednosť za poskytovanie verejných služieb, pričom sa musia vysporiadať s dynamickým a turbulentným prostredím a rozpočtovými obmedzeniami. Na druhej strane je na tieto organizácie vyvíjaný neustály tlak, aby inovovali, zlepšovali výkonnosť a poskytovali moderné dostupné služby pre občanov. Článok je zameraný na implementáciu systému kontraktov v riadení rezortných organizácií v zriaďovateľskej pôsobnosti Ministerstva školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu Slovenskej republiky, ktorý pokrýva široké spektrum rôzne zameraných organizácií.

Kľúčové slová: ministerstvo – rezortná organizácia – vládna agentúra – kontrakt.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, governments all over the world have created a large number of semi-autonomous agencies. Semi-autonomous agencies operate away from the government; they carry out public tasks such as regulation, service delivery, and policy implementation.

Compared to government bureaucracy, agencies face less hierarchical and political influence on their daily operations, and they have greater managerial freedom (Van Thiel, 2012).

In the Slovak Republic, these organizations have the legal form of budget and contributory organizations. According to Christensen et al. (2020), budget and contributory organizations, as part of public administration organizations, are representatives of socio-political organizations, are multifunctional, follow political leadership and usually do not operate in external markets.

Their establishment represents an important aspect of the New Public Management reform, while they are located far from the central government and are supposed to be more effective, as New Public Management encourages the state to consider its role and the tasks that need to be ensured and that can be delegated to agencies (Selase, 2018).

The management of budgetary and contributory organizations is particularly challenging. In addition to administrative issues, substantial political issues must also be addressed. Questions arise not only about the organization and structure but also about the values and culture of these organizations (Kickert, 2001). According to Reschenthaler (1998), the aim of an effective management system for these organizations is to develop a more favorable and more managerial/operational model. However, according to Hay and Cordery (2018), management practices in the public sector have developed through independent directors and control or audit committees in recent years. In contrast, Kútik and Karbach (2012) examine the issue with a focus on the public demand for better and easier access to information within the public sector, including the digitization of information flows and processes (eGovernment).

Ministries delegating tasks to agencies face accountability problems and have to introduce control structures, such as performance management, to ensure that agencies comply with their wishes. However, the impact of performance management might depend on the context in which it is applied. In the case of ministerial management of agencies, its impact is likely to depend on the ministry–agency relationship (Bjurstrøm, 2020).

According to Rochet (2002) the current management structures of public institutions reflect the predominance of legal procedures in regulating the relations between them and central administrations. Nevertheless, clear progress has been made in the development of contractual relationships between line ministries and institutions. Contractual practices are very widespread.

Performance contracts constitute an essential part of practicing performance management. These are quasi-contractual arrangements used to address asymmetric information; they serve

as instruments for setting performance-related goals, objectives, and rewards (Greve, 2000). The use of performance contracts in the management of agencies is a way for ministries to exercise control.

Moh and Tarjo aim to contribute with their research to provide an overview of financial management in government agencies from different perspectives in order to help improve the regulations and policies on state or regional financial management.

The main responsibility for the preparation of the budget estimates and for the preparation of the preliminary budget document rests with the chief executive of the organisation concerned. In their studies, Steiss and Nwangwu deal with program budgeting which provides the basis for resource allocation practices that incorporate the basic objectives of accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness (Steiss and Nwangwu, 2019a) and performance budgeting, which strengthens the management aspects of the budget process by focusing on operational savings and performance efficiency (Steiss and Nwangwu, 2019b).

The correct setting of the management of these organizations can help achieve strategic goals in the implementation of European funds, as was the case in the past (Nebeský and Šprochová, 2014) and improve the position of the Slovak Republic in the use of European funds within the European Union countries (Nebeský and Šprochová, 2015) considering the current possibility of drawing resources from the Recovery and Resilience Plan. To date, the negligence of government bodies has caused a lot of damage, and this negative impact continues (Kočišová and Stoličná, 2020). The need to continue to adopt and refine theory, institutions and practice based on complexity in a field as rich and diverse as public administration is still relevant (Eppel and Rhodes, 2018).

METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVE

The aim of the article is to clarify a specific tool for managing relations between ministries and budget and contributory organizations under the founder competence of ministries, specifically the system of “contracts “. This is not a contract in the legal sense, but a published internal planning and organizational document defining the relationship between the ministry and the departmental organization for the relevant calendar year. The article focuses on the implementation of the system of contracts in departmental organizations under the founding competence of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

The data sources include literature, resolutions of the Government of the Slovak Republic, internal regulations of the Ministry and contracts within the Ministry. Several analytical methods of materials, data and legislative documents are used in the information processing

and practical knowledge and experience in the field of education are implemented. Through the analysis of available regulations, the system of contracts applied by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport in Slovakia from 2013 to 2022 in management of its departmental organizations will be evaluated.

The methodology includes the methods of analysis, synthesis, induction and deduction are used, as well as the review of relevant literature, government resolutions that are binding for all central state administration bodies in the Slovak Republic, and finally, the internal regulation in the educational sector are analysed and evaluated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The system of contracts as a tool for material and financial management of budget and contributory organizations in the Slovak Republic

In compliance with the Ministry's Organizational Rules, the Ministry concludes contracts with departmental organizations in accordance with the Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 1370/2002. The contract is a published internal planning and organizational document defining the relations between the Ministry and the departmental organization and is not a contract within the meaning of the Commercial Code. Contracts are concluded separately for each calendar year (Minedu, 2022).

The obligation to conclude contracts with departmental organizations is established by a government resolution, which is binding for all ministries. Government Resolution no. 1370/2002 defines a contract as follows: A contract is a published internal planning and organizational document, the purpose of which is to make transparent the relations between central state administration bodies and organizations under their jurisdiction in the implementation of activities and their financing in the performance of public functions and activities of public benefit. In preparing the contracts, their integration with other planning and monitoring mechanisms in use is necessary. Contracts contain specified outputs that the central body of state administration orders from the directly managed budget or contributory organization and the capacity of human resources and financial resources allocated to them, so that the expected steps are clearly defined and so that it is explicitly determined who is responsible for their implementation (Government Office, 2002).

Contracts thus represent a flexible management tool for the management of budget and contributory organizations, which enables the Ministry to assign specific tasks to the organization and to finance their implementation. This tool is applied to the conditions of every organization and to all departments in Slovakia (Stoličná and Barjaková, 2021).

The preparation of the draft contract begins with the the central authority (its substantive departments in cooperation with the economic/budgetary department) submitting a needs analysis of the required activities to the budget or contributory organization and formulating their level of priority. Such a needs analysis can take the form of a list of specific (significant) required activities ranked in order of priority. On receiving the needs analysis from the central authority, the organization will prepare an estimate of human resource capacities as well as the total costs necessary for the implementation of individual required activities or will recommend its own proposals concerning the required activities and their level of priority. The final form of the contract draft will be determined after negotiations between the partners and will be used in the preparation of the budget starting points. In preparing the contract, it is necessary to identify the activities to be covered by the contract and to analyse the need for their implementation in the state administration. At this stage, the content of the activities listed in the organization's charter (and other documents, e.g. the statute and organizational rules) can be compared with reality. A clear definition of the activities of the budget or contributory organization and their correspondence with reality is very important. In determining the estimated costs of the activities, two partially overlapping characteristics should be assigned to the individual activities: the human resource capacity that is expected to be available in the implementation of the given activity and an estimate of the total costs of the given activity in monetary terms, including all the costs directly related to the activity (that is, mainly wage and insurance costs, as well as the costs of goods and services directly incurred for the given activity) and an aliquot percentage of those costs that cannot be assigned to specific activities (Government Office, 2002).

The central authority ranks the activities according to priority, that is, it determines and ranks the activities (services) that the central authority wants to commission from the organization within its jurisdiction. All significant activities should be included in the contract and cumulatively cover at least 90 % of the organization's costs attributable to specific activities. The central authority commissioning the activities through the contract, has the obligation to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of funds (Government Office, 2002).

According to the requirements of the Government Office (2002), the contract contains the following essential elements:

- a) the names of the central body of state administration and the organizations that conclude the contract,
- b) the duration of the contract,

- c) the rights and obligations of the parties,
- d) a list of the activities, goods or services to which the contract relates to and prioritization. The following data must be assigned to each activity: capacity of human resources for the activity to be contracted, an estimate of the total costs of the activity to be contracted, the parameters of the activity, method of financing, the main users of the activity,
- e) the method and date of contract evaluation,
- f) the method and frequency of internal audits, i.e., controls by the central authority,
- g) the method of publication of contracts.

Implementation of the contract system in particular Ministry department

Although the obligation to conclude contracts was imposed on the central state administration bodies by a government resolution in 2002, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic fulfilled this obligation, but without an internal regulation. The first regulation was implemented in 2019.

Directive no. 54/2019 on the procedure for the preparation of contracts and plans of main tasks of budget and contributory organizations is the first internal regulation that deals with a uniform procedure for the preparation of contracts and plans of the main tasks of departmental organizations under the competence of the Ministry of Education in Slovakia after the adoption of Government Resolution No. 1370/2002. The Directive regulates the process of preparing the contract and the plans of main tasks, their requirements in accordance with the adopted government resolution, extended to the needs of the Ministry and also including the overhead costs, evaluation of contracts and conclusion of amendments (Minedu, 2019). This regulation imposes the obligation to conclude amendments to the contract even when the organization's budget is changed in order to ensure transparency, as contracts and their amendments are published and internal budget measures issued by the Ministry are not subject to publication. The aim of the uniform adjustment of contracts is to extend them to include the economic part and to achieve a uniform procedure for all budget and contributory organizations. Individual tasks are defined in detail and time has been assigned to each task. The deduction of the tasks is made quarterly (Stoličná and Barjaková, 2021).

This Directive was repealed in 2023 and amended by Directive no. 37/2023, which, in contrast to the previous regulation, introduces the obligation to publish the contract in the Central Register of Contracts, like any other contracts in the legal sense concluded by public institutions, which is a consequence of the control of the Supreme Audit Office of the Slovak

Republic. This Directive also regulates the obligation to perform financial control in the preparation of the contract and streamlines the process of contract preparation within the competence of the Ministry. As for the deduction of contracts, each deduction of the departmental organization shall be accompanied by a statement considering the content and actual performance of the tasks specified in the contract, especially with regard to the fulfillment of performance parameters and the quality of the performance of these tasks. The Directive does not impose a strict obligation to conclude an amendment in the case of any change to the contract, especially if the budget for specific task changes.

However, according to the aforementioned government resolution of 2002, the contract can also be changed by a unilateral decision of the Ministry, which also applies to cases of budgetary measures issued by the Ministry, which are implemented and based on the organization's request to change the budget in accordance with the Directive no. 42/2019 on ensuring the budgetary process in the chapter of the state budget of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

Between 2013 and 2022, the Ministry was the founder of 11 to 17 departmental organizations. Of these, 10 organizations concluded a contract between 2013 and 2017 with a maximum total number of amendments of 1, while the budget of these organizations varied significantly. In 2018, 8 organizations signed a contract with one amendment. In 2019, 12 organizations concluded the contract with 5 amendments, in 2020, there were 11 organizations concluding the contract with 11 amendments, in 2021 10 organizations with 5 amendments, and in 2022, there were 11 organizations with 2 amendments. It appears that the implementation of internal regulation helped to establish a process of unifying contracts and concluding the amendments, but the process of concluding contracts requires constant monitoring and innovation, as there is a noticeable decrease in contract amendments.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the paper is to clarify a specific management tool for the management of relations between ministries and budget and contributory organizations with a focus on the founder competence of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that the goal has been achieved, although additional questions for further research arise, namely (i) to verify the effectiveness of the implementation of the contract system as a management tool of departmental organizations and

(ii) to answer if the system implemented in the government department corresponds to the withdraw of the budget as the amendments to the concluded contracts of the organizations do not correspond in terms of content or form concerning the increase in the budget of these organizations in each year.

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**ÚVOD DO SKÚMANIA PROBLEMATIKY KONŠPIRAČNÝCH
TEÓRIÍ¹**

An Introduction to the Investigation of Conspiracy Theories

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ABSTRACT: Conspiracy theories have become a ubiquitous element of the political and popular culture of contemporary human society in recent years. Theories explaining "how it really is (was), who is (was) behind it, in whose interest it is happening (happened)" and so on have become popular all over the world. Given their global spread and the persistence of many of them in society, it is not surprising that conspiracy theories have become the object of scholarly interest not only for historians, sociologists, psychologists, or anthropologists, but also representatives from other disciplines, e.g., political science, philosophy, cultural studies, security sciences, or mass media studies, and the subject of several scholarly papers in recent years. Therefore, the primary goal of the author of the study – is to contribute to the academic discussion and to deepen theoretical knowledge about conspiracy theories by using relevant scientific methods within the framework of qualitative theoretical interdisciplinary scientific research and the findings published in the works of renowned foreign and domestic authors.

Key words: conspiracy theories, science, society, people.

ABSTRAKT: Konšpiračné teórie sa v posledných rokoch stali všadeprítomným prvkom politickej a populárnej kultúry súčasnej ľudskej spoločnosti. Na celom svete sa stali populárnymi teórie vysvetľujúce „ako to v skutočnosti je (bolo), kto za tým stojí (stál), v koho záujme sa to deje (stalo sa)“ a pod. Vzhľadom na ich globálne rozšírenie a pretrvávanie mnohých z nich v spoločnosti, nie je prekvapujúce, že konšpiračné teórie sa v priebehu uplynulých rokov stali objektom vedeckého záujmu nielen historikov, sociológov, psychológov alebo antropológov, ale aj zástupcov z ďalších vedných odborov – napríklad politológie, filozofie, kulturológie či bezpečnostných alebo masmediálnych štúdií – a predmetom viacerých vedeckých prác. Aj preto je primárnym cieľom autora štúdie, s využitím relevantných vedeckých metód v rámci realizovaného kvalitatívneho teoretického interdisciplinárneho vedeckého výskumu a vychádzajúc pritom z diel renomovaných zahraničných i domácich autorov, prispieť k akademickej diskusii a prehĺbeniu teoretických poznatkov o konšpiračných teóriách.

Kľúčové slová: konšpiračné teórie, veda, spoločnosť, ľudia.

¹ Táto práca bola podporená Agentúrou na podporu výskumu a vývoja na základe Zmluvy č. APVV-20-0334 „Nie je to pravda, ale môže to byť: Konšpiračné teórie a hoaxy v modernom vývoji Slovenska v európskom kontexte“

ÚVOD

Hoci konšpiračné teórie boli už od dávnych čias súčasťou života ľudskej spoločnosti, pozornosť výskumníkov z viacerých vedných disciplín pritiahli až v posledných rokoch. Najmä v ostatnom desaťročí došlo k značnému nárastu záujmu akademikov o túto problematiku, čo následne prinieslo znateľný nárast poznatkov o vzniku, príčinách a dôsledkoch konšpiračného myslenia. Jedným z primárnych dôvodov zvýšeného akademického záujmu o konšpiračné teórie je fakt, že v súčasnosti už s najväčšou pravdepodobnosťou neexistuje žiadna významná udalosť – hospodárska, finančná, energetická alebo iná kríza, výsledok prezidentských alebo parlamentných volieb, smrť verejného činiteľa alebo populárnej osobnosti, teroristický útok, prírodná alebo priemyselná katastrofa, letecká, železničná, lodná alebo iná havária s tragickými následkami, politická vražda, atentát, vojenský konflikt, meteorologická anomália alebo epidémia či pandémie – ktorá by nevyvolala záujem konšpirátorov a o ktorej by následne nevznikli a nešírili sa nejaké konšpiračné teórie.

Konšpiračné teórie sa aj z dôvodu dosiahnutého rapídneho pokroku v oblasti vývoja nových, moderných informačných a komunikačných technológií, systémov a prostriedkov, vzniku nových médií a hlavne masívneho využívania rôznych „smart“ zariadení a platforiem sociálnych sietí stali všadeprítomným prvkom politickej a populárnej kultúry súčasnej ľudskej spoločnosti. Na celom svete sa stali populárnymi konšpiračné teórie vysvetľujúce „ako to v skutočnosti je (bolo), kto za tým stojí (stál), v koho záujme sa to deje (stalo sa)“ a pod. Vzhľadom na ich globálne rozšírenie a pretrvávanie mnohých z nich v spoločnosti medzi obyvateľstvom, nie je prekvapujúce, že konšpiračné teórie sa v priebehu uplynulých rokov stali objektom vedeckého záujmu nielen historikov, sociológov, psychológov alebo antropológov, ale aj zástupcov z ďalších vedných odborov – napríklad politológie, filozofie, kulturológie či bezpečnostných alebo masmediálnych štúdií – a predmetom viacerých vedeckých prác.

METODIKA A CIEĽ

Napriek pomerne značnému množstvu poznatkov, ktoré sa v priebehu niekoľkých uplynulých rokov nzbierali, a napriek pretrvávajúcemu záujmu odbornej i laickej verejnosti o konšpiračné teórie, doteraz bolo zaznamenaných len veľmi málo pokusov o zovšeobecnenie, resp. všeobecné predstavenie tohto fenoménu posledných rokov a jeho historických, politických, spoločenských a ďalších aspektov. Jednou z hlavných príčin je skutočnosť, že výskumníci, ktorí sa problematikou konšpiračných teórií zaoberajú, prirodzene rešpektujú určité hranice a nechcú rozšíriť skúmanie za hranice svojej vednej disciplíny, prípadne

konšpiračné teórie nie sú tou hlavnou prioritou v ich vedeckovýskumnej činnosti, nemajú na ich komplexný výskum vytvorené podmienky a pod. Viditeľne sa to prejavuje v tom, že napríklad v prácach patriacich do oblasti sociológie, antropológie alebo filozofie sa veľmi zriedkavo vyskytujú odkazy na nejaký politologický alebo psychologický výskum a naozaj len výnimočne napríklad na bezpečnostný výskum týkajúci sa konšpiračných teórií.

Aj preto je primárnym cieľom autora štúdie, s využitím relevantných vedeckých metód (najmä teoretickej analýzy a syntézy, kvalitatívnej a obsahovej analýzy, metódy štúdia dokumentov, vedeckej metódy teoretického zovšeobecňovania poznatkov a skúseností) v rámci realizovaného kvalitatívneho teoretického interdisciplinárneho vedeckého výskumu a vychádzajúc z diel renomovaných zahraničných i domácich autorov, prispieť k akademickej diskusii a prehĺbeniu teoretických poznatkov o konšpiračných teóriách. Zároveň je cieľom autora priniesť čitateľom z radov odbornej i laickej verejnosti najnovšie poznatky o jednom z najdiskutovanejších fenoménov súčasnej modernej ľudskej spoločnosti.

VÝSLEDKY A DISKUSIA

Ako už bolo naznačené v úvode, slovo „konšpirácia“ a súslowie „konšpiračné teórie“ sa stali v posledných rokoch doslova módnymi pojmami. Ľudia ich v bežných rozhovoroch pomerne často používajú, mnohokrát si ich však pletú a priradujú k nim rôzne významy. Z uvedeného dôvodu, ako aj v záujme úspešného vedeckého skúmania riešenej problematiky, je potrebné ich presné vysvetlenie. Preto v prvej časti tejto kapitoly zameriame pozornosť na teoretické a terminologické vymedzenie základných pojmov a v druhej časti na rozvoj konšpiračnej kultúry a konšpiračných teórií.

TEORETICKÉ A TERMINOLOGICKÉ VYMEDZENIE ZÁKLADNÝCH POJMOV

Definície oboch základných pojmov sa nachádzajú tak v odbornej literatúre, ako aj v rôznych slovníkoch a encyklopédiách. Napríklad Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka konšpiráciu definuje ako „*tajne pripravovanú, organizovanú činnosť proti autorite, režimu a pod.*“ [1]. Podobne vymedzuje tento pojem aj Encyklopédia Beliana, a to ako „*tajne organizovanú činnosť (sprisahanie, komplot) proti režimu, jeho predstaviteľovi a pod.*“ [2]. Podľa Slovníka cudzích slov ide o „*sprisahanie, komplot, metódy, ktoré je nevyhnutné zachovávať v tajnosti*“ [3].

Takmer identicky vymedzuje konšpiráciu český Akademický slovník cizích slov, podľa ktorého „*konšpirácia označuje sprisahanie, komplot; metódy a opatrenia ilegálneho boja,*

ktoré nutné zachovávať v záujme utajenia“ [4]. Anglický Oxfordský slovník charakterizuje konšpiráciu ako „tajný plán skupiny ľudí urobiť niečo škodlivé alebo nezákonné“ [5], a konšpiračnú teóriu ako „vieru alebo presvedčenie, že za udalosť je zodpovedná tajná, ale mocná organizácia“ [6]. Podľa Encyklopédie Britannica sa konšpiráciou rozumie „sprisahanie, tajný plán dvoch alebo viacerých ľudí na vykonanie niečoho, čo je škodlivé alebo nezákonné“, resp. ide o „akt tajného plánovania urobiť niečo, čo je škodlivé alebo nezákonné“ [7]. Konšpiračná teória je v encyklopédii definovaná ako „teória, ktorá vysvetľuje udalosť alebo situáciu ako výsledok tajného plánu zvyčajne mocných ľudí alebo skupín“ [8].

V rámci jednoduchého zovšeobecnenia tak možno uviesť, že konšpirácia je sprisahanie a konšpiračná teória je teória o sprisahaní (v literatúre sa niekde možno stretnúť aj s označením sprisahanecká teória). Kým konšpirácia je teda pojem, ktorý predstavuje skutočné sprisahanie, akých bolo v histórii ľudskej civilizácie mnoho, tak konšpiračná teória je teória, ktorá sa iba snaží vysvetliť nejakú významnú politickú, hospodársku, spoločenskú alebo inú udalosť ako sprisahanie.

Konšpiračné (sprisahanecké) teórie) v zásade predstavujú názory, podľa ktorých istá skupina ľudí vedome a tajne (konšpiračne) pôsobí v neprospech inej skupiny ľudí alebo dokonca v neprospech celého ľudstva. Konšpiračné teórie vysvetľujú viaceré historické alebo súčasné udalosti ako výsledok tajného sprisahania skupiny vplyvných a mocných činiteľov. Vyznávači konšpiračných teórií najčastejšie tvrdia, že touto skupinou je vláda, predstavitelia tajných spoločností, organizácií alebo služieb, jedna alebo viacero spoločne pôsobiacich firiem alebo predstavitelia štátov, národov či náboženstiev (najmä cudzích alebo minoritných), a občas aj mimozemské civilizácie. Spoločným menovateľom týchto tajných, mocných a vplyvných skupín je ich nekontrolovateľný skrytý vplyv a z toho vyplývajúca potenciálna všadeprítomnosť a všemocnosť. Okrem samotných pôvodcov konšpiračných teórií (konšpiračných teoretikov) im v ich činnosti pomáha sieť vedomých alebo nevedomých pomáhačov, ktorí odmietajú všeobecne akceptované vysvetlenie udalostí [9][10][11].

TEORETICKÝ POHĽAD NA ROZVOJ KONŠPIRAČNEJ KULTÚRY A KONŠPIRAČNÝCH TEÓRIÍ

Tvrdenie, že svet v súčasnosti prechádza obdobím "módneho konšpirátorstva" [12] nie je vôbec potrebné vyvracať. Prieskumy verejnej mienky, ktoré sa uskutočnili v uplynulých rokoch po celom vo svete dokazujú, že značná časť obyvateľstva priznáva, že verí v nejakú konšpiračnú teóriu. Napríklad v Spojených štátoch amerických (ďalej len „USA“) prieskumy ukazujú, že 30 až 40 % obyvateľstva aj po vyše dvadsiatich rokoch stále verí, že oficiálna správa

o teroristických útokoch z 11. septembra 2001 je zavádzajúca a neopisuje udalosti tak, ako sa reálne stali, resp. veria, že americká vláda sa podieľala na tejto akcii, a to buď priamo, nastražením výbušnín, ktoré v skutočnosti spôsobili pád Twin Towers (Dvojičiek) a nie náraz lietadla do nich, alebo nepriamo tým, že teroristov úmyselne nezastavili [13]. Tento názor zdieľalo podľa vtedajších prieskumov aj 20 až 40 % občanov Nemecka, Kanady a Spojeného kráľovstva [14][15]. Prieskum uskutočnený v piatich prevažne moslimských krajinách ukázal, že viac ako tri štvrtiny respondentov neverí že útoky z 11. septembra 2001 uskutočnila Al-Káida, a namiesto toho tvrdili, že za nimi stojí americká a izraelská vláda [16]. V Egypte zasa podiel ľudí, ktorí veria, že za 11. septembrom stojí Izrael, predstavuje až 43 % populácie [17].

Ďalšie prieskumy uskutočnené v Spojených štátoch, Veľkej Británii a v iných krajinách tiež potvrdili, že veľká časť obyvateľstva nepovažuje za pravdivé oficiálne, nekonšpiračné vysvetlenia mnohých iných známych a dramatických udalostí, ako boli napríklad atentát na amerického Johna Fitzgerelda Kennedyho, výbuch lietadla TWA 800 nad Atlantikom, smrť princeznej Diany alebo pristátie amerických astronautov na Mesiaci. Ďalšie prieskumy zistili, že polovica až dve tretiny Američanov veria, že vláda USA vie o mimozemských civilizáciách viac ako verejnosti hovorí, čo odhaľuje nielen to, že väčšina americkej verejnosti verí v existenciu mimozemského života, ale tiež to, že toto ich presvedčenie sa prelína s vierou v rozsiahle zakrývanie skutočností, ktoré riadi vláda [18].

O zvyšujúcej sa popularite konšpiračných teórií svedčí napríklad aj to, čo možno opísať ako skutočný priemysel konšpiračných teórií, zahŕňajúci autorov, vydavateľov, médiá, inzerentov, organizátorov podujatí, špecializovaných zájazdov a predajcov spomienkových predmetov. V 21. storočí sa literatúra o konšpiračných teóriách objavila na zoznamoch bestsellerov v Spojených štátoch, Nemecku, Francúzsku, Spojenom kráľovstve, Japonsku, Číne a mnohých ďalších krajinách. Len počet kníh vydaných v Japonsku na tému židovského sprisahania bol taký veľký, že niektoré kníhkupectvá ich skladovali vo vyhradenom „židovskom kúte“ [9]. Konšpirační teoretici zaoberajúci sa udalosťami z 11. septembra 2001 ako Thierry Meyssan² alebo David Ray Griffin³ sa dokonca stali medzinárodnými celebritami po tom, čo boli ich práce publikované v desiatkach jazykov po celom svete.

² Thierry Meyssan – francúzsky novinár, ľavicový konšpiračný teoretik a politický aktivista. Je autorom vyšetrovaní extrémnej pravice, najmä milícií francúzskeho Národného frontu, ako aj katolíckej cirkvi. Jeho kniha 9/11: Big Lie (9/11: Veľká lož) spochybňuje oficiálny popis udalostí teroristických útokov z 11. septembra 2001.

³ David Ray Griffin – americký profesor filozofie náboženstva a teológie a konšpiračný teoretik. Vydal množstvo kníh o útokoch z 11. septembra 2001, pričom tvrdil, že do toho boli zapojené zložky Bushovej administratívy. Ako zástanca teórie sprisahania o riadenej demolácii bol zakladajúcim členom organizácie Scholars for 9/11 Truth.

V posledných rokoch sa okrem kníh venujúcich sa konkrétnym konšpiračným teóriám, ako napríklad údajnému celosvetovému židovskému sprisahaniu, udalostiam z 11. septembra 2001, atentátu na prezidenta Kennedyho, smrti princeznej Diany, alebo tajným spolkom v podobe slobodomurárov, iluminátov či klubu Bilderberg, ale aj iným teóriám, rozšírili aj ďalšie knihy, ktoré ponúkajú prehľad najznámejších alebo najbizarnejších konšpiračných teórií všetkých čias [19][20][21]. A tak revidované, aktualizované, doplnené alebo rozšírené vydania týchto kníh vychádzajú každých pár rokov, čím sa zabezpečuje stály prísun nových a starých tvrdení.

Napríklad klasika v tejto oblasti od Jonathana Vankina a Johna Whalena *Fifty Greatest Conspiracies of All Time (Päťdesiat najväčších sprisahaní všetkých čias)*, bola v rokoch 1995 až 2004 štyrikrát aktualizovaná. Autori postupne vždy pridali desať konšpiračných teórií až sa z nej nakoniec stala kniha *Eighty Greatest Conspiracies of All Time (Osemdesiat najväčších sprisahaní všetkých čias)*. Najnovšie vydanie publikácie sa nazýva už len jednoducho *World's Greatest Conspiracies, The History's Biggest Mysteries, Cover-Ups and Cabals (Najväčšie svetové sprisahania, najväčšie záhady histórie a tajnosti)* [22]. Tieto a podobné diela venované konšpiračným vysvetleniam jednotlivých udalostí veľmi jasne odrážajú skutočnosť, že vydavatelia si veľmi dobre uvedomujú, že trh s materiálmi tohto druhu existuje, prináša zisk, a preto podobné publikácie vydávajú.

Ďalším odvetvím mediálneho priemyslu, ktoré sa podieľa na šírení konšpiračných teórií, je káblová televízia. Za posledné dve desaťročia prakticky každý hlavný televízny kanál alebo sieť v USA, Kanade, v Spojenom kráľovstve, Nemecku, Holandsku a v ďalších liberálnych demokratických krajinách odvysielal dokumentárne filmy, ktoré skúmali tú či onú konšpiračnú teóriu. Káblové siete špecializujúce sa na historické dokumenty, ako napríklad *History Channel* alebo *Discovery Channel*, medzitým zdokonalili žáner "špekulatívnej histórie". Tento osobitný štýl dokumentárnych filmov sa venuje "kontroverzným" udalostiam, ktoré boli predmetom konšpiračných špekulácií a ktoré v programoch vysielaných na predmetných televíznych staniciach čakajú na uspokojivé a presvedčivé vysvetlenie.

Hoci vysielané dokumentárne filmy o "špekulatívnej histórii" nemajú tendenciu priamo podporovať konšpiračné teórie, na druhej strane ale predkladané interpretácie jednotlivých udalostí ani neodmietajú ako neopodstatnené alebo vyslovene nepravdivé. Je to preto, že konšpiračné a nekonšpiračné názory sú neoddeliteľnou súčasťou tohto žánru. Konšpiračné interpretácie sú prezentované ako rovnako rozumné stanoviská v legitímnej diskusii. Prispievateľom do týchto programov – bez ohľadu na to, či už sú to vedci, inžinieri, súdni znalci, historici, amatérski nadšenci, ufológovia alebo milovníci konšpirácií – sa zvyčajne

venuje rovnaká pozornosť a je na divákovi, aby zhodnotil argumenty, posúdil predkladané "dôkazy" a zvážil, ktorá zo súperiacich interpretácií je pravdepodobnejšia. Nevyhnutným výsledkom tohto prístupu, ktorý sa vyhýba akémukoľvek pevnému záveru alebo uzavretiu príbehu odstránením pochybností a nejednoznačnosti, je podľa Thompsona fakt, že je to na úkor skutočnej vedeckej práce [23].

Vznik národných celodenne 24/7 vysielajúcich spravodajských kanálov vytvoril nové možnosti pre medzinárodné šírenie konšpiračných teórií. Názorným príkladom je televízny kanál Russia Today (dnes už len RT), ruský spravodajský kanál vysielajúci v anglickom jazyku, financovaný štátom, ktorý je celosvetovo dostupný prostredníctvom káblovej televízie alebo satelitu. Kanál bol založený v roku 2005 s cieľom poskytovať alternatívu k televíziám ako CNN, BBC alebo Sky News, ktoré podľa názoru zakladateľov RT bezvýhradne presadzujú zahraničnopolitickú agendu západných mocností. V snahe poskytnúť nový "kritický" pohľad na svetové dianie (motto kanálu je "Viac sa pýtať") Russia Today otvorila svoje dvere konšpiračným teoretikom z celého sveta, z ktorých mnohí pochádzajú z USA a ďalších západných krajín. Kanál im poskytol príležitosť prezentovať pred medzinárodným publikom svoje konšpiračné myšlienky, napríklad o Novom svetovom poriadku (New World Order), 11. septembri 2011, globálnej hospodárskej a finančnej kríze, dlhovej a úverovej kríze v eurozóne, prebiehajúcich konfliktoch či o klimatických zmenách. Videoklipy z ich vystúpení v Russia Today sa stali tak pevnou a pravidelnou súčasťou webových stránok konšpiračných teoretikov, ako znak ich odbornosti, dôveryhodnosti a uznania ich teórií.

Konšpiračné vysvetlenia známych udalostí, kríz, katastrof a pod. sa vzhľadom na pretrvávajúci záujem o ne objavujú aj v tlači, a to nielen v bulvárnych novinách, ktoré sa snažia získať čitateľov a inzerentov uverejňovaním najrôznejších bizarných konšpiračných príbehov (napríklad Daily Express), ale aj v ďalších periodikách, vrátane populárnych časopisov, ktoré sa venujú otázkam súvisiacim s vedou a technikou alebo s históriou či budúcnosťou ľudstva a ktoré poskytli platformu pre rôzne konšpiračné teórie (napríklad Harper's Magazine, American Spectator, National Review). Typickým príkladom takéhoto periodika je na Slovensku časopis *Zem a vek*, ktorý sa síce prezentuje ako „alternatívne médium bez reklamy“, ale v skutočnosti články v ňom uverejnené predstavujú ilustratívnu ukážku toho, čo sú to konšpiračné teórie [24].

Hlavným médiom šíriacim konšpiračné teórie však dnes už nie je ani tlač, ani televízia, ale internet a sociálne siete. Konšpiračné teórie, ktoré sa ešte v časoch pred jednou ľudskou generáciou šírili vo forme fotokópií rôznych bulletinov a brožúr, v knihách predávaných v špecializovaných kníhkupectvách alebo prostredníctvom amatérskych videí, ktorých výroba a distribúcia bola náročná a nákladná, sa dnes dostávajú do celého sveta prostredníctvom

internetu a sociálnych sietí. A to takmer okamžite a len s minimálnymi nákladmi. V posledných rokoch sa konšpiračné teórie rozšírili na internete do takej miery, že v júli 2023 sa pri zadaní výrazu "konšpirácia" objavilo vo vyhľadávacom spoločnosti Google 336 miliónov výsledkov [25] a pri súslóví "konšpiračné teórie" 70,7 miliónov výsledkov [26]. Najnovší vývoj v oblasti moderných informačných a komunikačných technológií, systémov a zariadení tak umožnil konšpiračným teoretikom osloviť novú generáciu prijímateľov konšpiračných teórií, ktorí pravidelne trávajú čas na internete a sociálnych sieťach.

Konšpiračné teórie sa postupne tiež stali nevyhnutnou súčasťou tzv. fikčných žánrov. Celosvetový úspech seriálu Akty X v 90. rokoch minulého storočia je zjavným a často opísaným príkladom popularizácie konšpiračných teórií [27]. Konšpiračné motívy sa objavili napríklad aj v úspešných hollywoodskych trhákoch ako JFK alebo Teória sprisahania a vo viacerých ďalších úspešných amerických televíznych produkciách z posledného obdobia, ako napr. 24, Prison Break alebo Lost. Príbehy o sprisahaniach a ich krytí sa objavili aj v mnohých knižných a neskôr sfilmovaných bestselleroch. Výborným príkladom sú napríklad romány Dana Browna *Da Vinciho kód*, *Anjeli a démoni* alebo *Stratený symbol*. Ich obrovský úspech je pripisovaný skutočnosti, že tieto príbehy o sprisahaniach trvajúcich dve tisícročia sa zhodujú s dobou paranoidnej podozrievavosti voči oficiálnym inštitúciám a náboženstvám, teda s tým, čo fascinuje ľudí na konšpiračných teóriách. To, čo Brownove romány urobili, bolo, že sa zo sveta konšpiračných teórií preniesli do fikčného žánru a zároveň zámerne a veľmi šikovne zahmlili hranice medzi faktami a skutočnosťou, medzi fikciou, konšpiračnou teóriou a skutočnou históriou [28].

"Paranoidná podozrievavosť voči oficiálnym inštitúciám", ktorú Lawson označil za faktor, ktorý výrazným spôsobom podnecuje šírenie konšpiračných teórií, sa prejavuje nielen v postoji k náboženským inštitúciám, ale aj voči vede, vedeckým inštitúciám a autoritám [29]. Nedôvera voči vede a vedcom stále viac preniká do súčasnej konšpiračnej kultúry. Pre mnohých konšpiračných teoretikov je celá veda a vedci v službách chamtivých farmaceutických spoločností, nátlakových skupín, medzinárodných organizácií a iných zlovestných orgánov, ktoré sa snažia manipulovať a využívať verejnosť. Mnohé konšpiračné teórie tvrdia, že vedecká a lekárska komunita vo všeobecnosti a zvlášť veľké farmaceutické spoločnosti fungujú so zlovestnými cieľmi a proti verejnému blahu, že zatajujú účinnú liečbu alebo dokonca spôsobujú a zhoršujú široké spektrum chorôb za účelom ziskovosti alebo z iných nekalých dôvodov [30]. Niektoré konšpiračné teórie zahŕňajú tvrdenia, že prírodné alternatívne lieky na zdravotné problémy sú potláčané, že lieky na liečbu vírusu HIV spôsobujúceho AIDS sú neúčinné a škodlivé, alebo že liek na všetky druhy rakoviny bol už objavený, ale pred verejnosťou je skrytý

[31], ako aj tvrdenia o tom, že vakcíny proti koronavírusu spôsobujúceho ochorenie Covid-19 sú neúčinné, ale na liečenie ochorenia sú dostupné alternatívne lieky [32]. Vo všetkých prípadoch pritom konšpirační teoretici obviňujú farmaceutické spoločnosti zo snahy o zvýšenie už aj tak nemalých ziskov.

V mnohých konšpiračných teóriách sú odmietané aj dôkazy o globálnom otepľovaní. Podľa konšpiračných teoretikov ide pri ňom len o manipuláciu, zastrašovaciú taktiku a nástroj medzinárodného sprisahania, ktoré organizujú tí, ktorí politicky a finančne profitujú z klimatických zmien [33]. Konšpiračné teórie sa nevyhýbajú ani takým témam, ako je napríklad Darwinova evolučná teória. V roku 2008 napríklad vznikol dokumentárny film *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed (Vylúčený: Inteligencia nie je povolená)*, ktorý zarobil až 10 miliónov dolárov a stal sa trinástym najziskovejším dokumentárnym filmom v histórii USA. Tvrdí sa v ňom, že Darwinova teória vďačí za svoju popularitu po stáročia systematickému potláčaniu dôkazov, ktoré ju nepotvrdzujú, predstaviteľmi sekulárnej a materialistickej filozofie, ktorí ovládajú vedecké inštitúcie.

Ďalší z príkladov konšpiračného podozrievania vedy, ktorý ilustruje smrtiaci potenciál konšpiračných teórií, sú tvrdenia o AIDS a Covide-19. Podľa popieračov týchto ochorení ide o rozsiahle sprisahanie farmaceutických firiem a západných vládnych agentúr. Konšpirační teoretici tvrdia, že antiretrovírusové lieky podávané pacientom s vírusom HIV alebo vakcíny proti koronavírusu sú škodlivejšie ako samotné vírusy a že ich používanie je motivované buď chamtivosťou alebo ešte zlovestnejšími cieľmi, genocídu niektorých skupín obyvateľstva nevynímajúc. Vplyv takýchto konšpiračných teórií mal fatálne následky pre mnohých ľudí, ktorí im uverili, a zároveň sa stal dôležitou prekážkou úspechu kampaní v oblasti verejného zdravia v mnohých krajinách [34].

Príklad konšpiračných teórií súvisiacich s ochoreniami AIDS a Covid-19 jasne ilustruje ako nebezpečné by bolo odmietnuť konšpiračné teórie ako obyčajnú kuriozitu alebo ako len neškodný prvok súčasnej masovej kultúry. Aj história dokazuje, aké nebezpečné sú konšpiračné teórie. Ako príklad možno podľa Panczovej uviesť globálne konšpiračné teórie o židovskom, slobodomurárskom, iluminátskom či sionistickom sprisahaní, ktoré využívala propaganda totalitných režimov na ospravedlnenie represálií proti svojim odporcom [35]. Okrem toho viaceré ďalšie dramatické a tragické udalosti priniesli nežiaduce prepojenie medzi konšpiračnou kultúrou a masovým násilím. Napríklad členovia pseudobudhistickej sekty Óm Šinrikjó, motivovaní túžbou zasadiť úder zlovestnému sprisahaniu Židov a slobodomurárov, v roku 1995 vypustili počas rannej dopravnej špičky v tokijskom metre vysoko toxickú, nervovo-paralytickú bojovú chemickú látku sarin, ktorá patrí medzi najtoxickejšie bojové otravné

látky. V metre vtedy zahynulo 16 a zranilo sa 5 000 cestujúcich [36]. Iný čin, teroristický útok na federálnu budovu v Oklahoma City v USA v roku 1996 bol inšpirovaný knihou *The Turner Diaries (Turnerove denníky)*, v ktorej je opísané ako sa americká spoločnosť ocitla v zovretí židovsko-černošskej diktatúry [37].

Mnohé konšpiračné teórie zostávajú aj v súčasnosti základnou zložkou propagandy nielen krajne pravicových milícií alebo totalitných siekt, ale aj teroristických hnutí na celom svete. Charta palestínskej teroristickej organizácie Hamas sa napríklad odvoláva na notoricky známe Protokoly starších Sionu ako dôkaz, že "sionisti" sa usilujú o ovládnutie sveta a využíva antisemitský hoax na legitimizáciu svojich útokov na izraelskú armádu a civilné ciele. Predpokladá sa, že aj v prípade teroristických útokov z 11. septembra 2001 si Al Káida vybrala zámerne taký cieľ, ktorý odrážal záujem radikálnych islamistických hnutí o Wall Street a celú finančnú štvrť v New Yorku ako o centrum židovskej moci v USA. [38].

Keďže konšpiračné teórie sú pomerne často príbehmi o globálnej moci a vplyve, majú tendenciu padnúť na úrodnú pôdu v kultúrach, spoločnostiach, hnutiach a/alebo skupinách, ktoré sa cítia byť nejakým spôsobom marginalizované, ohrozené alebo obeťami globálneho politického poriadku. Kritici západnej vojenskej, hospodárskej a diplomatickej nadvlády a tí, ktorí chcú spochybníť liberálno-demokratické hodnoty a princípy často premietajú svoje obavy a nespokojnosť do všeobecnej tézy o sprisahaní. Najmä lídri autoritárskych režimov siahajú po teóriách sprisahania ako po prostriedku na posilnenie svojej moci, potláčanie politického disentu a po zdroji pohodlných výhovoriek pre hospodárske neúspechy a marginálne postavenie svojich krajín vo svetovej politike [39].

Skutočnosť, že konšpiračné teórie, príbehy o sprisahaniach a podvratnej činnosti sa dostali do rétoriky širokého radu režimov z celého sveta, pravicových aj ľavicových, náboženských aj sekulárnych, kresťanských, moslimských aj iných, poukazuje nielen na popularitu a geografické rozšírenie konšpiračných teórií, ale aj na ignorovanie ideologických bariér a ich pozoruhodnú schopnosť „ohýbať“ politické spektrum a spájať jeho extrémny do nekonečného kruhu paranoje“ [40].

ZÁVER

Konšpirační teoretici majú vo všeobecnosti ambivalentný postoj k zdokumentovaným a overiteľným prípadom sprisahaní, zneužití moci, podvodov a pod. Pre nich nie sú dokázané prípady napríklad zneužitia moci hodné pozornosti, a to preto, že spôsob, akým boli odhalené, ich vedie k podozreniu, že tieto odhalenia boli samé o sebe zastieraním niečoho ešte oveľa zlovestnejšieho. Prívrženci konšpiračných teórií sa síce občas zmieňujú o skutočných

konšpiráciách, ale len ako o východiskových bodoch, na ktorých sa potom dajú postaviť nepravdepodobné príbehy o aktivitách budúcich vládcov sveta. Preto sú napríklad odhalenia o skutočnom sprisahaní CIA s cieľom zavraždiť Fidela Castra v kontexte konšpiračnej teórie premenené na „dôkaz“, že atentáty (úspešné alebo neúspešné) na Johna F. Kennedyho, Martina Luthera Kinga Jr., Johna Lennona alebo Ronalda Reagana museli byť výsledkom činností amerických spravodajských agentúr.

Odhalené experimenty CIA s manipuláciou mysle alebo o vládou podporovaných tajných lekárskejších experimentoch sú pre konšpiračných teoretikov zaujímavé len do tej miery, že „dokazujú“, že vláda nerobí nič dobré. Súčasne slúžia ako katalyzátor tvrdení, že každá predstaviteľná choroba, od AIDS, cez ebolu, vtáčiu a prasaciu chrípku, až po Covid-19 je produktom nejakého tajného komplotu, ktorého cieľom je ak nie úplná genocída, tak minimálne kontrola určitej časti populácie. Reálne sprisahania zo skutočného sveta sú preto odrazovým mostíkom pre to, čo Hofstadter označil za „veľký skok od nepopierateľného k neveriteľnému“, ktorý leží v jadre konšpiračného príbehu [41].

To nás v závere privádza k tomu, čo je pravdepodobne najdôležitejšou črtou všetkých konšpiračných teórií – sú zo svojej podstaty nevyvrátiteľné. Logické rozpory, nepotvrdzujúce dôkazy, alebo dokonca aj úplná absencia dôkazov nemajú absolútne žiadny vplyv na konšpiračné vysvetlenia, pretože sa vždy dajú vysvetliť ako sprisahanie. Nedostatok dôkazov o sprisahaní alebo akýkoľvek pozitívny dôkaz proti jeho existencii sa obráti v prospech a je braný ako dôkaz prefikanosti úzkej mocnej tajnej skupiny stojacej za sprisaháním a ako potvrdenie jej schopnosti utajiť svoje aktivity. Konšpiračné teórie sú tak podľa [42] „jedinými teóriami, pre ktoré sa dôkazy proti nim skutočne považujú za dôkazy v ich prospech“ [42].

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**IMPLEMENTATION OF BLENDED LEARNING IN TERTIARY
EDUCATION OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Implementace kombinované výuky v terciárním vzdělávání pracovníků ve zdravotnictví a
sociální péči během pandemie covid-19

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ABSTRACT: Blended learning is a relatively new e-learning method that combines traditional classroom learning with computer-mediated instruction. Its roots can be traced back to the 1840s when Sir Isaac Pitman sent tasks to his students on postcards for evaluation. It represents a new way of teaching, employing modern technologies and the online environment, whilst simultaneously emphasizing the importance of traditional teaching methods and personal contact between students and teachers. Blended learning has proven to be an effective way to combine scheduled and self-paced classwork, ensuring its better accessibility and flexibility. This article discusses the implementation and effectiveness of a blended-learning course designed to train communication skills in students studying healthcare-related programmes at the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences of the University of South Bohemia, Czech Republic. The course uses a combination of face-to-face instruction, individual student work, and multimedia online materials. It is divided into modules specific to the student's field of study, such as nursing, nutritional therapy, and civil protection. Each module includes theoretical and practical sections, and the course covers communication skills with seniors, adults, children, and disabled clients. A questionnaire survey was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the course and student satisfaction in order to obtain feedback for further development and improvement of the course. The data obtained from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Gini index. The results show that the blended-learning course was effective in training communication skills and reducing the number of failures.

Key words: blended-learning, e-learning, implementation, communication, survey.

ABSTRAKT: Smíšené učení je relativně nová metoda elektronického učení, která kombinuje tradiční výuku ve třídě s výukou zprostředkovanou počítačem. Její kořeny sahají až do 40. let 19. století, kdy sir Isaac Pitman posílal svým studentům na pohlednicích úkoly k vyhodnocení. Představuje nový způsob výuky, který využívá moderní technologie a online prostředí a zároveň zdůrazňuje význam tradičních výukových metod a osobního kontaktu mezi studenty a učiteli. Ukázalo se, že smíšená výuka je účinným způsobem, jak kombinovat plánovanou a samostatnou práci ve třídě, a poskytuje tak větší přístup a flexibilitu.

Tento článek pojednává o implementaci a efektivitě kurzu kombinované výuky určeného k nácviku komunikačních dovedností u studentů studujících zdravotnické obory na Zdravotně sociální fakultě Jihočeské univerzity v České republice. Kurz využívá kombinaci prezenční výuky, samostatné práce studentů a multimediálních online materiálů. Je rozdělen do modulů specifických pro studijní obor studenta, např. ošetrovatelství, nutriční terapie, ochrana obyvatelstva. Každý modul obsahuje teoretickou a praktickou část a kurz zahrnuje komunikační dovednosti se seniory, dospělými, dětmi a handicapovanými klienty. K posouzení efektivitě kurzu a spokojenosti studentů bylo provedeno dotazníkové šetření, jehož cílem bylo získat zpětnou vazbu pro další rozvoj a zdokonalení kurzu. Získané údaje z průzkumu byly analyzovány pomocí popisné statistiky a Giniho indexu. Výsledky ukazují, že kurz kombinované výuky byl účinný při nácviku komunikačních dovedností a snižování počtu neúspěchů.

Klíčová slova: blended-learning, e-learning, implementace, komunikace, průzkum.

INTRODUCTION

Learning is a complex process that takes place throughout our lives, anywhere, and at any time. Blended learning is limited to the school environment. At this point, it seems appropriate to clarify the etymology of the word school, which has its roots in the ancient Greek word *scholē* (*leisure*). This fact may come as a surprise to us since nowadays school and leisure are opposed to each other.

In ancient Greece, knowledge was not acquired in institutions, and science was the product of leisure, i.e., a time when free people were not preoccupied with their duties. Today, duty is the school – an institution – while leisure is time spent outside school. Nevertheless, leisure or *scholē* makes the current concept of blended learning possible, as blended learning contributes to a reasonable combination of school and extracurricular activities.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Blended learning is a relatively new e-learning method that has emerged as a result of the rapid development of new technologies over the last few decades. It is rooted in the need to create a bridge between school and out-of-school learning. Surprisingly, the first recorded case of blended or distance learning ever recorded dates back to the 1840s, over a century before experts started to design the prototype of the Internet. Sir Isaac Pitman, a British teacher of the English language, sent his students tasks on postcards and asked them to send them back for evaluation (Pappas, 2015). The origins of actual blended learning, or e-learning, began with the Internet-based instruction (Pappas, 2015) in 1998. However, it could also be seen in the 1960s; although the term itself was still to be discovered and no network media were present. A

common trend was the introduction of technologies into education, such as film, radio, television, and teaching machines, at a time when progress and success went hand in hand with optimism for the future (Cuban, 2003; Johnson, 2003). Nevertheless, e-learning itself is not linked to analogue technologies but to the computer development. Primitive e-learning systems emerged with personal computers in the 1970s; their primary purpose was to monitor students' progress (computer-managed learning; Rushby, 1979), and to assist in routine activities (computer-assisted instruction (Steinberg, 1990)). This approach also allowed the use of printed and electronic materials, a feature typical of blended learning with one substantial difference – no use of network systems. While the above-mentioned approach primarily supported the organisation of the teaching process, the broad category of computer-assisted learning aims to make the teaching processes in institutions easier, while seeking to develop students' abilities to solve problems and classify phenomena and information. The primary tool of this approach is the stimulation of students' creativity, cooperation, social skills, and research practices (Preston, 2008).

The new dimension of computer-assisted learning is related to the Internet, which became widespread in the last decade of the 20th century. We can say that this was the precursor of modern e-learning due to its emphasis on interconnecting learners, teachers, and communities. The immense development of the Internet has also enabled so-called 'web-based learning', the primary principle of which is searching for information or performing tasks online. Resource-based learning can be characterized as a subcategory of web-based learning; it builds on the altered role of the teacher who is no longer the primary source of information (Ryan, 2000).

Although modern technologies have revolutionised the teaching process, it is unlikely that traditional methods will come to an end. Evidence of this may be the current fusion of traditional classroom learning and e-learning; a widely used concept that inevitably evokes the above-mentioned ancient Greek perception of school and learning. Blended learning is also commonly referred to as mixed-mode, flexible, or hybrid learning (Müller, 2021; Graham, 2018). Hybrid learning is sometimes characterised by using technology to replace classroom time (Saichaie, 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid learning was often described as a combination of face-to-face classes and online. Perhaps the most widely used definition of blended learning is that of Graham (2005): "blended learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction." A more recent definition views blended learning as an integral part of the teaching process, referring to it as "the new traditional model" or "the new normal" (Dziuban, Graham, Moskal, Norberg, & Sicilia, 2018). Blended learning

clearly shows that traditional teaching elements are successful even in the era of advanced technologies. Singh (2021) points out the benefits provided by traditional approaches, such as working in one place, engaging learning experience, and creating in-depth discussions. Personal contact also leads to more challenging interactions and often stimulates students' performance. Blended learning represents a comprehensive package of tools and a wide range of personalisation – from groups to an individualised approach. The contributors and creators are not only teachers or representatives of schools and universities, but also the students themselves. Therefore, blended learning leads to greater accessibility and flexibility (Graham, Bonk, 2005). Another advantage is the combination of scheduled and self-paced classwork (Singh, 2017). In this context, Singh et al. (2021) mention that introducing online teaching may not always be motivated by improving the effectiveness of the course and student performance. For example, in the 1990s some countries – presumably those with less socialist systems – replaced face-to-face instruction with online courses as a more cost-effective option for students.

FINDINGS

Despite the recent widespread adoption of new technologies in education, little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of blended learning has been implemented; either in general (Singh et al., 2021) or in social work and nursing education (Berga et al. 2021). The purpose of our study was to take a closer look at the available general studies that deal with blended learning in tertiary education, as well as those focused on healthcare and social sciences, i.e., fields that are closely related to our field of interest.

Müller (2021), in his systemic review of blended learning in higher education, states that if classroom time is reduced first by 30% and then by 79% and supplemented with online instruction, the results are comparable with traditional instruction. Similar conclusions were made by Berga et al. (2021), whose quasi-experimental study confirmed earlier findings that students enrolled in blended learning courses reported a higher level of satisfaction (Owston et al., 2013; Larson and Sung, 2009; Johnson et al., 2010). Other recent studies go even further, claiming that blended learning positively influences student outcomes (Aslam, 2015; Clement et al., 2016; Koşar, 2016; Liashenko, 2019; Soler et al. 2017, Grønlien et al., 2021). In their non-systemic review, Musrifatul et al. (2019) highlight the successes of blended learning in nursing education, such as enhanced professional cooperation between students and medical professionals through assertiveness, responsibility, communication, autonomy, coordination, understanding of general goals, mutual respect, trust, and increased critical thinking. A meta-

analysis of research on blended learning in the field of health care education not only proves that this method of learning brings positive results, student satisfaction and professional abilities, but also calls for standardized blended learning strategies and evaluation indicators in order to enhance and balance the development of nursing education (Du et al., 2022; Leidl et al., 2020; Uliyah et al. 2019). The benefits of blended learning have also been identified in the field of social work; in terms of greater interconnection between on-campus students and students who study via distance learning (Maple et al., 2013).

An interesting finding is that despite the positive results attributed to higher student engagement and motivation, a significantly high percentage of students reported having difficulties with blended learning in comparison with traditional education. This may be due to the students' computer literacy level (Liashenko, 2019). Other problems students may face with online instruction include increased distractions and headaches caused by increased screen exposure. Abou Hashish et al. (2022) state that, in their study group, up to 65.7% of students reported a higher incidence of headaches. The level of computer literacy, hardware, quality of the internet connection, health problems resulting from prolonged screen exposure, lack of physical activity, and frustration caused by failure or dissatisfaction with performance may also pose a risk for teachers, especially those of higher age (Cabello, 2022). Teachers' experience with technology and its effective and successful implementation in the educational process also influence the results of blended learning and satisfaction of teachers and students (Tawafak et al., 2019; Alqurashi, 2018). This raises the question of the ethical aspects of blended or e-learning; a topic that is mostly not addressed in studies that deal with its effectiveness – perhaps because this unanticipated aspect is overshadowed by the enthusiasm for new technologies. Differences in access to technology, age, experience, personal attitudes, and social background may also provoke discussions on equal opportunities in terms of blended learning models. In recent years, discussions on blended learning practices have revealed the complexities and nuances in understandings, experience, and intertwined relationships between students and their lecturers (Schwarz et al., 2018). In conclusion, although most recent studies point to the benefits of blended learning (as is the case of any new approach), we are obliged to consider all possible aspects and to further develop and exploit its advantages while avoiding its disadvantages. As Joan Tronto writes in her *Ethics of Care* “*While perfection is impossible, improvement is not.*” (Tronto, 2001).

BLENDED LEARNING IN PRACTICE

The dynamic development and implementation of modern technologies into the instruction of professional subjects began to gain importance before the breakout of the Covid-19 pandemic, but this situation later helped to accelerate the process. The evolution of teaching methods based on electronic technologies clearly reveals future trends in this field and the necessity of active engagement in this issue.

The use of information technology for teaching education was also tested at the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences of the University of South Bohemia (FHSS USB) during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, due to the lockdown of schools and universities when distance teaching was the only possibility. The strongest need for teaching was in practice-oriented study programmes, due to the necessity of timely preparation of students for their clinical practice. The emphasis on the speed of the process was accentuated by the urgent need for hospital personnel in overloaded hospitals. The tools which proved useful in that situation were the online materials that had been created and tested earlier within the “Strategic Project OP VVV, DA 2.2 New teaching methods support.” These were published on the faculty website as “Blended-learning course – Training of Communication Skills”.

Type of course

The course focusses on training communication, an important skill required by graduates for their future work in the helping professions. Most study programmes not only demand verbal communication with clients; non-verbal communication and behaviour are also important. The goal of implementing these modern methods is to help students handle the situations they will face and be required to solve in practice. These methods are based on the application of information technology using a combination of face-to-face instruction and individual student work, followed by summarizing and utilizing the knowledge gained in solving model situations that prepare students for real situations they will encounter in their future career.

The course uses online multimedia elements to stimulate, support and direct students’ learning activities during practical simulation training with dramatization. The online materials support both full-time and part-time instruction and contribute to reducing failure rates when applied. The implementation of modern technologies and attractive teaching methods also adds a higher degree of authenticity to the learning experience.

Individual topics are divided into sub-modules according to fields of the respective study programmes in line with the objective of developing innovative media and inclusion.⁴ The introductory sections provide fundamental study materials, which are then supplemented with targeted resources to facilitate the acquisition of the necessary knowledge for effective communication with specific client groups or individuals.

These materials are primarily intended for online phase of the course. Students can process them individually, without the teacher's help, at their own individual pace, and according to their time availability. Each of the theoretical parts ends with a self-assessment test and teacher evaluation.

This part is followed by practical content intended for the face-to-face phase of the course. Practical instruction is based on working with video recordings, which contain examples of correct and intentionally erroneous communication. The situations in the recordings simulate examples of interactions with some typical clients the students might encounter in their professional life. The methodology for working with simulation methods is described in detail in the methodological guide: "Methodology of the use of simulation methods in a blended-learning course – communication skills training".

The practical sections of the individual modules also contain sources that will help students solve the tasks at the end of each module.

Students can work with the individual modules in chronological order, or to select sections according to the current or future needs of the specific group. Each module can be applied in teaching in accordance with the specific needs of courses focused on professional communication. Topics in the modules also allow for combinations, e.g., topics related to nutrition can also be included in communication instruction in other courses such as nursing.⁵

⁴ The modules on the website are divided as follows:

- Communication in nursing
- Communication in nutritional therapy
- Communication in civil protection
- Healthcare communication in English

Each module consists of several parts:

- Introduction to communication in the respective field
- Basic information
- Basics of communication in the given field
- Principles of communication in the given field
- Recommended relevant sources

⁵ Each course module contains the following communication-specific topics:

- Communication with seniors
- Communication with adults
- Communication with children
- Communication in the workplace
- Communication with handicapped clients

The module ‘Issues of communication in health care in English’ was included in the course due to the need to be able to communicate in at least one foreign language.

Its structure is similar to the sections created for practicing professional communication in the Czech language but is extended by a glossary of professional vocabulary and a grammar section.⁶

METHODS

To assess the effectiveness of the blended-learning course and facilitate its further development and expansion, we conducted a questionnaire survey that included testing of individual components. Descriptive statistics was then used to analyse the survey data, which included response rates and the Gini coefficient. The survey was administered to students enrolled in the General Nursing study programme during the peak of the pandemic (when physical contact was limited). Despite these challenges, students of general nursing, midwifery, and paramedicine were able to attend essential clinical subjects in person, while other lectures and seminars were conducted in real-time on Microsoft Teams. The course in question was delivered in the 2020/21 academic year, and at the end of the summer semester, all 151 students completed an anonymous questionnaire, achieving a 100% response rate. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions, including 12 close-ended and 3 open-ended questions, focusing on the following topics:

Benefits of the course.

Difficulty of the course.

Suitability of the choice of topics regarding the student’s future profession.

The relevance of the sources to the topic.

The benefit of the exercises for the development of theoretical knowledge.

The benefit of the exercises for the development of practical skills.

Clarity of exercise instructions.

⁶ The English module is divided into five sections:

- practicing professional vocabulary and consolidating knowledge of grammatical structures related to professional expression
- work with professional texts (with a check-up test)
- work with video
- guided communication related to given tasks
- final test

The manual for working with the English-language module can be found in the methodological instructions for students.

Difficulty of assigned tasks.

The benefit of videos for completing assigned tasks.

The benefit of videos to improving professional communication skills.

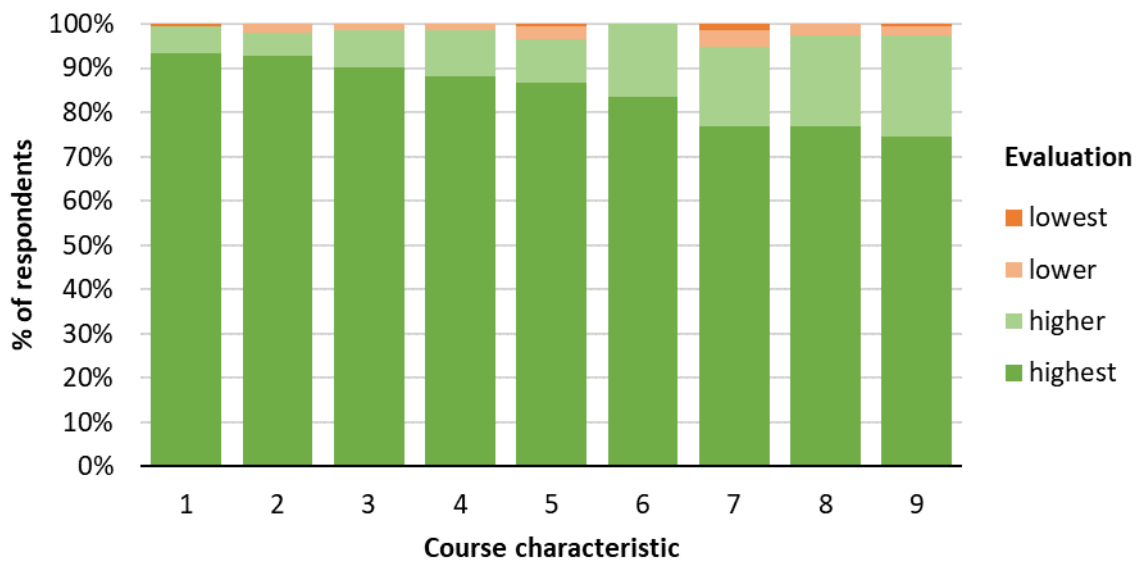
Difficulty of self-assessment tests.

Evaluation of the benefits of the blended-learning course.

RESULTS

As seen in Figure 1, the respondents rated the benefits of all parts of the course very highly, with virtually no negative answers. Among the most positively rated were the benefits of the videos both for the theoretical knowledge and practical communication skills. The least positive items included the benefits of the learning resources, the benefit of the course as a whole, and the attractiveness of the instruction.

Figure 1: Evaluation of nine course characteristics



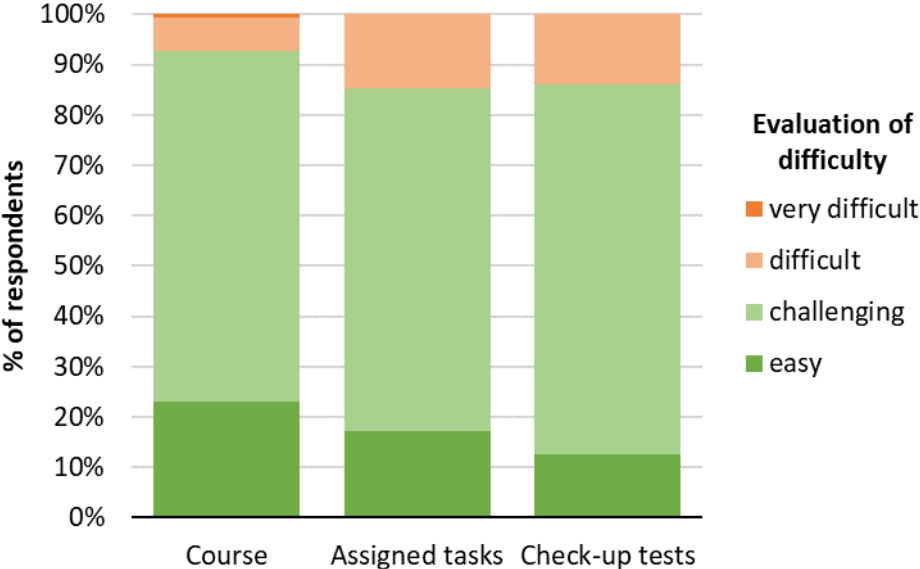
From the best to the worst: 1 – Benefits of the videos for improving professional communication skills; 2 – Benefits of the videos for performing the assigned tasks; 3 – Benefits of the topics with regard to the future profession; 4 – Benefits of the exercises for the development of theoretical knowledge; 5 – Benefits of the exercises for the development of practical skills; 6 – Clarity of exercise instructions; 7 – Relevance of the literature resources; 8 – Benefits of the course as a whole; 9 – Attractiveness of blended-learning instruction.

Source: Authors.

Figure 2 shows the predominant evaluation of the course, tasks, and tests as challenging. According to the Gini coefficient, the benefits of the videos for the improvement of communication skills and the completion of assigned tasks are the items the respondents most

agreed with in their responses (Gini 0.12 and 0.14, respectively). On the other hand, the most negatively evaluated characteristic were all the difficulty measuring items (with the Gini coefficient ranging from 0.43 to 0.48).

Figure 2: Evaluation of three course characteristics measuring difficulty



Source: Authors.

As mentioned above, the questionnaire contained 3 open-ended questions:

Question #1 Which parts of the course did you find the most helpful?

Question #2 Were there any parts of the course unhelpful for you?

Question #3 Were there any topics missing from the course?

In this part, students were given an opportunity to openly express their observations and subjective feelings about the course. In response to Question #1, the majority of students rated the videos positively (96%). This was followed by the exercises (71%) and the self-assessment tests (69%). Most answers to Question #2 were negative (86%). However, a small number of students perceived the recommended literature (10%) and self-assessment tests (4%) as being less important for their professional development. Notably, Question #3 produced some intriguing responses, with some students requesting activities that dealt with less common communicative scenarios, such as communication with aggressive and uncooperative patients (3 %).

DISCUSSION

The benefits of the course became apparent in the final phase of the project, where students provided mostly positive feedback. The questionnaire survey showed that the videos were particularly effective in improving communication skills, with 141 respondents (93 %) confirming their benefits. Most students saw the benefit of the videos for completing assigned tasks – 140 (93 %), for their preparation for their future professions – 136 (90 %), for the development of theoretical knowledge – 133 (88 %), and for improving practical skills – 131 (87 %). However, 116 students (77 %) rated the relevance of the recommended resources to the topic and the benefits of the course worse; 113 students (74 %) gave worse rating to blended learning as such, pointing out the necessary support for teachers to improve their skills in blended learning.

As expected, the greatest agreement in the responses correlated with the topics that were rated the highest in terms of benefits: the benefit of the videos in relation to improving professional communication skills, the benefit of the videos in relation to completing the assigned tasks, and individual topics related to future career. The biggest differences in responses appeared in relation to the difficulty of the assigned tasks, the difficulty of the course, and the difficulty of the self-assessment tests.

Overall, the responses indicated that the majority of students evaluated the course positively, particularly the sections that focused on practical communication skills with different groups of patients (which corresponded to its primary objective).

Despite the positive findings, we acknowledge that their generalizability might be limited by the study's focus on a single faculty. Although the results provide valuable insights into the experience of students in that particular setting, it is essential to consider the unique context of different faculties and institutions. The results of the study thus represent only a small segment in the current interdisciplinary research on the implementation of blended learning. Moreover, the exclusive focus of the survey on students' experience is another limitation of the study. It is equally important to examine the views of faculty members of blended learning, as they play a critical role in shaping the design and in the delivery of courses. Understanding faculty members' views, attitudes, and practices concerning blended learning is crucial for its effective implementation and adoption. Further research should thus include faculty members' views and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of blended learning.

As mentioned above, the course was implemented during a period of limited physical contact with students. However, when face-to-face teaching was restored, the integration of

online study materials proved to improve the quality and effectiveness of the courses, enhancing greater student engagement. The introduction of innovative methods has also deepened the understanding of specific courses, and significantly improved students' practical skills and abilities necessary for their professional development. The authors believe that the emphasis on high-quality self-study, both in distance learning and face-to-face instruction, created favourable conditions for an overall reduction in academic failure. These assumptions are now being monitored and will become the subject of verification and further research aimed at determining the optimal degree of blended learning involvement to achieve maximum teaching effectiveness.

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RECENZNÍ ŘÍZENÍ PRO Č. 1/2023

Jednotliví oponenti (8) recenzovali 1–2 články. Redakce od nich obdržela na každý příspěvek 1–2 posudky, celkem 10 posudků.

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POČET OBDRŽENÝCH VĚDECKÝCH ČLÁNKŮ:	8
POČET RECENZOVANÝCH VĚDECKÝCH ČLÁNKŮ:	6
POČET OBDRŽENÝCH RECENZNÍCH POSUDKŮ:	11
POČET PUBLIKOVANÝCH VĚDECKÝCH ČLÁNKŮ:	6

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